Dear Mary

05 April 2019

Thank you for chairing the Committee’s oral evidence session on the sustainability of the fashion industry on 18 December 2018. The Government is determined to end modern slavery in global supply chains. During the session there was a point you raised that could not be answered fully in the time available, I have addressed this in detail below.

You asked if uniforms for the British Government have been supplied from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. These countries do feature at some stage in the supply chain of some uniforms purchased by Government Departments. It is important to note that other risk factors (apart from country of origin) should be considered when assessing the risk of modern slavery in a supply chain, such as the amount of low skilled manual labour or use of un-regulated temporary labour in the factories where the goods are made.

Each Department is responsible for its own procurement processes which are monitored and regulated by their own commercial teams. For example, a Home Office supplier of fire and rescue service uniforms has factories in Bangladesh which are audited under a Sedex Members Ethical Trade Audit (4 Pillar and semi-announced), monitored and managed through in-country offices and rated 100% by the Bangladesh Accord and Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety.

There is a significant amount of work underway across Government Departments to ensure they are better able to identify and address modern slavery risks. The Cabinet Office is developing a Procurement Policy Note with detailed guidance for commercial and procurement staff across the public sector to identify and address modern slavery in public sector supply chains.

The Home Office is also launching a Modern Slavery Assessment Tool, freely available to public sector organisations, to use with their top suppliers, which will guide suppliers through the good practice they should incorporate to make their business more resilient to modern slavery risks.
Along with the Ethical Trading Initiative, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and some of our international partners, we hosted an international conference on tackling modern slavery in public procurement on 27 March 2019 in London. The conference promoted the sharing of good practice in the public sector and helped build greater international collaboration on these issues.

We recognise the importance of being transparent about the steps Government is taking to tackle these risks in our own supply chains. The Prime Minister announced at the G20 last year that the Government will publish a Modern Slavery Statement in 2019 detailing the steps Government is taking to address modern slavery risks in public procurement.

I hope this answers the questions raised by the Committee.

Victoria Atkins MP
Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability
Minister for Women