

## **SPEAKING NOTES FOR LAUNCH OF 'SLAVE BRITAIN' PHOTO EXHIBITION AT ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL 20 FEBRUARY**

**This exhibition should shock and shame us.**

**Wilberforce, and the thousands of ordinary people whose protests help secure the passing of the Act to abolish the transatlantic slave trade 200 years ago, would be profoundly disappointed by our lack of progress since.**

**I welcome the work of Panos, and other organisations, in raising awareness of the continuing existence of human trafficking and in challenging us to finish the work started by the 19<sup>th</sup> Century abolitionists.**

**Commemorating their work will be a hollow gesture however if it does not lead us to renew efforts to end this traffic for good.**

**In Britain we are taking action both to strengthen our efforts to defeat the criminals who run this despicable trade, and to help its victims. I am delighted that the Prime Minister was able to announce last month that the UK will be signing the Council of Europe Convention on Human Trafficking. In the next few months we will publish the UK Action Plan on Human Trafficking – taking account of the many contributions received during the public consultation last year.**

**In some ways, it seems that little has changed in 200 years. Then as now, greed and disregard for the rights and dignity of fellow human beings drove this inhuman trade. Then, as now, the only way to defeat this is for good people to come together and fight for change.**

**But while trafficking and slavery are prohibited by international and national laws and conventions, we now know that to end trafficking and slavery we must also address the underlying reasons why so many people are vulnerable to exploitation. And part of this is about poverty.**

**Today DFID has published a booklet – Breaking the Chains, eliminating slavery and ending poverty – like the photographs here - it tells a number of very shocking stories.**

**Stories like that of 13 year old Thuy in Vietnam, who left home thinking she was going to a good job that would enable her to send back money to her impoverished family. Instead she found herself forced to work long hours without pay in a brick factory. Like the young women in these photographs, desperately poor, with little education and lacking any social protection, she fell victim to the false promises of a trafficker. But rescued from her bondage, and with the help of education and skills training provided by the Vietnam Women’s Union, Thuy was able to break the cycle of exploitation.**

**Thuy and many others have been helped by a programme that DFID is funding with the International Labour Organisation. It works across the Mekong sub-region, covering Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and China's Yunnan Province. It supports local partners to make communities aware of the danger of trafficking. And it provides education and skills training so that young people like Thuy have a better chance of earning a living and are less vulnerable to the traffickers.**

**But as long as one in five people live in extreme poverty, as long as 77 million children are not enrolled in primary school, and as long as too many countries have ineffective government - there will be a ready supply of victims for the greedy and unscrupulous.**

**To fight trafficking and slavery today needs a commitment to improve governance and security, health and education, and decent work for poor people.**

**That so many people should be trafficked into forced labour in Britain is a situation which horrifies us all. We must – all of us - act to stop the traffickers and support their victims. But we have a moral obligation not only to those who we find on our own door step, but to those in far away places too. Human trafficking and contemporary slavery are part of the greatest moral challenge today - to end global poverty - and as yet its abolition is unfinished business.**