

## India plans a riposte to slavery report

After sending a rebuttal to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) challenging India's ranking in a global slavery report, India will build pressure on the global body to distance itself from the Australia-based NGO-Walk Free Foundation.

It was the WFF, founded by Australia's mining mogul Andrew "Twiggy" Forrest, that had compiled the report. Indian security agencies informed the Prime Ministers Office (PMO) that though the methodology of sampling was not clear, the WFF's entire focus was on India and had "enough potential to substantively harm India's image and kill its exports market".

The PMO was warned that there was "evidence of rising interest of private and multilateral institutions in highlighting human trafficking and forced labour as modern-day slavery, with India being the largest hub of slaves".

### Point-wise rejoinder

The Centre has tasked the V.V. Giri National Labour Institute, an autonomous body under the Labour and Employment Ministry, to prepare a point-wise rejoinder to the 'modern slavery' report.

"The entire thrust is to get WFF out of United Nations and ILO matters. The NGO published its first report in 2013 and the methodology adopted by them is opaque," said a senior government official.

Asked about the methodology adopted by the WFF in conducting the survey in India, its spokesperson Martina Ucnikova in an e-mail response shared the web link of the methodology made public recently.

"While not without gaps and limitations, the Global Estimates of Modern Slavery provide the international community with the best available data and information that exists about the scale and distribution of modern slavery today," the methodology paper said.

As per the report, the highest number of people, 17,000, were surveyed in India and it was placed in a cluster of 53 countries like Honduras, Belize, Iraq, Pakistan and China.

Elaborating on "debt bondage," the report cited an interview from an unidentified person, which said, "For example, a 30-year-old male victim of forced labour in India described the situation he and his wife faced as having '...become a curse on both of us. We had threats against our family and we also got the threat that we would be evicted from our house and the village. There were also threats of violence'."

### 'Not recognised'

The Labour Ministry shot off a strong letter to the ILO regarding its report titled 'Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage 2017,' The report released on September 19 did not contain any India-specific findings, barring one mention that 17,000 people were interviewed for the survey.

An official said it did not recognise the WFF's work in the area of labour study.

"We note that the ILO report uses data primarily from independent surveys conducted by WFF, a private organisation. We would like to know why the ILO tied up with WFF to produce a report on

'modern slavery' – a term ILO hasn't so far defined in its own conventions," said a senior Labour and Employment Ministry official.

Another official said the ILO had defined 'forced labour' and 'bonded labour' and the Indian laws were aligned with the ILO's conventions.

"The ILO, without following any protocol, endorsed WFF's survey," the official said.

ILO Director-General Guy Ryder didn't respond to an e-mail questionnaire despite repeated reminders.

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***Senior Official***

***Labour Ministry***

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