Dear Sir / Madam,

***Re: Consultation on New Plan for Immigration – Victims of Modern Slavery***

We welcome this opportunity to respond to the Government’s New Plan for Immigration specifically in terms of how it relates to victims of modern slavery.

Having read through the Government’s proposal for the reform of the asylum seekers and refugee system in the UK we would like to convey our mixed response to the proposals.

We commend the Government in having taken a global lead in identifying and responding to the cruelties of modern slavery and human trafficking through both the Modern Slavery Act and the development and implementation of the 2014 Modern Slavery Strategy. This work was pioneering and we would hope that the Government would continue to place these concerns at the heart of its reforms for the immigration system.

The Modern Slavery Strategy noted that the scale of modern slavery in the UK was significant and that on a year by year basis there was a noticeable increase in the number of identified victims. Given that the Government’s previous assessments have indicated a rise in the number of genuine victims the current proposals emphasis on criminality and bogus claimants in many ways obscures the present realities of modern slavery in the UK. Furthermore, the data provided in the current proposal states that 89 per cent of individuals submitting a claim received a positive reasonable grounds decision. On this basis, it is reasonable to assume that the vast majority of individuals’ claiming asylum due to human trafficking are genuine.

We would therefore ask the Government to ensure that its intended response towards tackling criminality and national security concerns are commensurate with the actual threat of abuse. By this, we refer to the proposals to shift the balance of probabilities towards those who can substantiate their claim and thereby raising the threshold whereby a positive reasonable grounds decision can be made. We ask the Government to release the data on what proportion of claims currently received by the Home Office have been substantiated with objective proof prior to making such fundamental changes to the system.

We are also concerned that in raising the threshold for a reasonable grounds decision that this will have an adverse impact on the ability of genuine victims to make a successful claim. We would ask the Government to clarify what proportion of individuals whose claims of human trafficking and modern slavery have been accepted are then granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK. In reading through the current proposals it appears this would no longer be an option for victims, only a temporary right to remain.

Given the well-known association between human trafficking and modern slavery the Government’s proposal to classify all asylum and refugees on the basis of how they entered the UK would mean that a large proportion of victims on submitting a claim for asylum would immediately be classified as ‘illegal’ migrants. This designation would automatically exclude them from gaining a permanent right to remain in the UK. We would urge the Government to employ a more compassionate approach in its response to those who have suffered serious trauma as a result of the exploitation, abuse and personal hardship they have endured at the hands of human traffickers.

Yours faithfully,

CLLAMS (Christians in Leicester & Leicestershire Against Modern Slavery)