

Talks at GS
with Louise Hlland, broadcaster and journalist
and Lisa Donnelly, head of European Operations
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Lisa Donnelly: Good afternoon and welcome to Talk to GS. I'm Lisa Donnelly, I'm head of European Operations and global head of core operations. And I'm delighted to welcome broadcaster, journalist and author Louise Hlland. Recently, Louise become known for her work on modern slavery, and she published a book last year, covering this topic entitled "Stolen Lives: Human Trafficking and Slavery in Britain Today." Louise, thanks for joining us.

One of the things that came as a huge surprise to me in learning more about this is that the majority of the 136,000 enslaved people are British. And I think we might be guilty of thinking of this as a faraway problem, or almost see people that you just referred to the brought here from another country. But clearly there's another dimension to this. It's happening here to people who've lived here for most, or in fact, all of their lives in some cases. What kind of experiences to these people have and what are some of the examples of that?

Louise Hlland: So one of the reasons that the numbers in the UK have gone up now in the way that we're counting them is because of the criminal gangs around county lines. So if you don't know, county lines is a crime prevalent in all over all over the UK now where drug dealers will use manipulate, scare, persuade, groom young people to carry drugs from A to B. The county lines are the phone numbers, not the actual lines of the county. It's not a geography thing. It's the lines, the phone lines that they use. And their tactics, again, focus on fear, manipulation, coercion, Hey, if you do this for me, you will be in my gang We're looking at you, you learn this money or three sweats[?] as well. Um, so that's one of the big reasons of why the numbers in the UK or why victims in the UK are rising because this is a crime that's on the rise.

Secondly, we also hear stories of the manipulation and the abuse and the kidnap, and that's enforced slavery of people who have not necessarily had the best look in life, people that were living on the streets, people with addiction, substance issues, they're easy pickings for traffickers. And I think one thing is really important for me at this point to say is to get an idea of the mind of the trafficker. This is £120 billion a year crime. It is low, low risk, very high reward for the criminal gangs. So for them, they have no qualms about treating people as poorly as they need to do, whether it is supplying someone already vulnerable with their substances, that they need to keep them under their control, whether it's luring them with the possibility of a better life and a better job, or whether it's through control and fear.

Lisa Donnelly: What is being done at the governmental or charitable level to increase the risk for the perpetrators to do something about it, to address it?

Louise Hullah: Well, I think it's firstly really important to say that things are being done. I think there's probably a big debate around how much, how quickly and how well. There are some amazing charities working on the ground here in the UK and abroad. And there's some really good joined up thinking happening globally as well. The game changer in Britain was the Modern Slavery Act in 2015. It was the passion project of Theresa May. And as one person in my book told me, there might be a lot of questions around her premiership towards the end, in terms of Brexit and how that played out. But this is one thing that she can be really, truly proud of, politics aside, the Modern Slavery act. It's been changing legislation. I think a lot of people say, well, does it go far enough? And we can debate that for sure. But the Modern Slavery Act of 2015 has been used as guidance globally, as well as I believe Australia's also used our legislation as a template to their own.

And essentially what it did – it did three things. It brought all the bits of legislation that were already there that the police have to scramble about to use to try and prosecute such cases into

one place. So they said right, this is legislation now specifically about trafficking and slavery, which is really, really helpful to the police, the prosecutors, et cetera. It also changed sentencing to make sure that the sentences are [inaudible] with judges. And it brought in something called section 54, which is really interesting because it brings in the business side of modern slavery saying that basically big businesses had to provide a modern slavery statement, essentially saying what they're doing to identify slavery in their supply chain, what they're doing to identify what they're doing to stop it. Now, there are loads of criticisms around how meaty, for example, for want a better word, that that legislation is, how much businesses are being held to those promises that they have to do that. But that was a real game changer in Britain.

This debate's going on pre COVID of course, as to how that can be improved because one main criticism was that in the legislation, the bit that was dedicated to helping victims was kind of left blank. It was guidance that said we will fill the same [inaudible] and several years, on I think by, I think I wrote the book in 2019, that was still a gap. Four years later, it was still a gap as to what we were doing for victims in this country.

Lisa Donnelly: Could you share some of, some of those stories that you've covered?

Louise Hullah: Yeah. I mean, it was actually laying a story that changed everything for me because I'm sure. There's a lot of horror in this world and there was so much of it, but I think for most people, we just can't compute it. I think any good normal, healthy person cannot get their head around the amount of people and the level of suffering that there is on the planet and sometimes you need to look into the eyes of one person, and all of a sudden that brings the context that you need. Elena was an Albanian student. She just finished her degree and met a young man called Marco and they fell in love. And because Elena grew up in a very traditional village in Albania, the idea of any kind of premarital relationship was very much frowned upon.

So when Marco wanted to take her to Belgium to meet his family, she was thrown out. They haven't said, you go and you don't come back and she did that. She went with Marco and when she got to Belgium, all of a sudden the family were on holiday and she wasn't going to be staying with his parents and they actually stayed in a hotel and gradually, she realized that all was not what it seemed. And one day he took her to see a friend in an anonymous, suburban house, somewhere in Belgium. She still doesn't know to this day where she was. Marco left, and just deserted her. And that night, she had her first client because that house was a brothel, and she was, I mean, I'm very aware of the time of day, but I think no one – everyone can use very much as to the level of horror that she experienced for 10 months in a brothel where even though she was saying to the man initially that came in, I don't want to be here, this is against my will. It didn't seem to stop anybody.

And there was a change in her fate when she found out that she's pregnant and there was a bit of respite for her because she was quite ill during the pregnancy and the traffickers, they basically just let her not work. And one day she – cut a very long story short, managed to escape. She made her escape. She, I say legged it, but probably not that well at seven months pregnant by that point. But she managed to make her escape and found a lorry driver – hitchhiked a ride with the lorry driver, who she just said, I don't care where you going, wherever you're going is fine with me. Just, I don't want to here. And the place that he took her at was London. And that began her journey of recovery and settlement here in the UK, which wasn't again, without this it's traumas and that's where I met her. I interviewed her for another story and we kept in touch.

And when it came about that her asylum status and her, I think it's important to point out that normally if were a victim of a crime, we go to the police and the police gives a reference number and the police are the people we deal with, if we're a victim, but with trafficking and slavery cases, it actually goes through the home office. And Elena got the decision from the home office that actually no, we don't believe your accounts and we aren't giving you the status as a victim and

therefore we knew that that would then have a knock-on effect on her immigration status too. So that began a very long and complex journey through the appeal system.

Lisa Donnelly: What about the separation sort of more broadly, internationally and cross border? How does that work? You know, to try and close down some of these routes and lower the crime?

Louise Hullah: Well, obviously I can't speak for every case and every police force and every NGO. But from what I've seen when researching the book and from the people that I've been working with, there is obviously a huge appetite to if a case is discovered in the UK, then of course it'll be cooperation with the police forces in the relevant countries, DMCA, border force and all these. There's so many agencies that work in co in collaboration with other international organizations. Obviously COVID and Brexit, two huge things that could potentially impact that going forward, but certainly the will is there from the amazing challenges I've seen on the ground. A lot of them have a global presence. A lot of them actually work with smaller NGOs.

One of the things that I find amazing, and again, just to illustrate the point of holistic work is there is a brilliant, organization called Stop the Traffic and they work with data. And I'm not that technically minded. So I have to have this explained to me quite simply, but actually once they did it, it was fine. What they do is they – because they work with so many people on the ground in countries, they have this first-hand intelligence about how – what traffickers are doing, what tactics they're using, who they're targeting. They go away. They send that data back to the team in the UK, and they come up with amazing campaigns that are streamlined exactly for the right audience. So rather than it being a generic, global response, they're actually taking data from the ground, learning from it, working with it, and then sending back out the right message target the right people in the right area to say, this is what you – where you are in your village right now need to be aware of. And I find that quite empowering because it's so forensic and so simple and yet so powerful.

Lisa Donnelly: Yeah, no, absolutely. You mentioned the pandemic and COVID. How has that exacerbated the issue? Has it exacerbated the issue? How was affected it overall, would you say?

Louise Hulland: Well, like any issue in the world ever when the world stops, the light is shun away from so many causes and issues that need attention and trafficking. Like all of that will be one of them. It affects, I think in three main ways. Firstly, the people that we know about, the people that are in recovery that are in safe houses when – aside from the fact that their regular routine on which they rely, the therapy, the art therapy, the English lessons, the socialization, all these things that are so small to us that mean the world to them because it's all the parts of the jigsaw about putting their lives back together. That obviously changed dramatically. These bits of routine, a bit of agency that have over their life, that's taken away and it's also potentially very triggering for them because there are a lot of the people will be safe houses or in asylum accommodation with many people all locked up again together. And whilst we know that the lockdown was for our interest to keep us safe. That's not to say that the impact of being told you have to stay where you are again, and bearing in mind, they don't have nice houses to enjoy. It is one kitchen, shared space and a bedroom, that's been a huge negative effect on many, many survivors because it's taken them right back to that place of trauma. So that's the main thing. Then we think about the trafficker – the victims of trafficking that we don't know about who were operating as clean as in takeaways, in nail bars. When that shut down, where have they gone? What's been happening to them?

That's been a terrifying thing. And that would be identified globally as well. And the third thing is actually the future now because we know that traffickers target the vulnerable, whether people fleeing a war zone and natural disaster, environmental refugees, which I think we're probably going to be seeing quite a lot more of in the coming years and decades. COVID has created a crisis. A crisis has created vulnerable people and traffickers, target vulnerable people. So this is only going to make the matter worse. And when you tie that in with the fact that people who maybe

aren't as vulnerable, but they'll still be impacted from the economic impacts of COVID, that makes it quite a toxic mix if you've got a society that's looking for cheaper and quicker, and you've got more people who can be exploited, that mix is potentially very dangerous.

Lisa Donnelly: I have just, again, hovering over the economics of this problem. So you said it generates a huge, you know, a huge amount of money, £120 billion for the criminal organizations that are involved. It's getting some focus. Why do you think it doesn't get more focused or the focus that it needs?

Louise Hulland: I ask myself that quite a lot and I think a lot of it comes down to the fact that there are so many awful things going on in the world that we can focus on. Secondly, I think I mentioned before, most people just can't quite comprehend that this can happen. And also, why would you want to kind of accept it as truth because it's such a horrific thing and you almost don't want it to infiltrate your life because it's so horrifying. But I don't think those are good reasons, really, for us to turn our back on the issue because it is affecting so many people around the world and it does affect our life. You know, the laptop I'm using to talk to you, the phone that I've got by my side, probably the dress that I'm wearing, it does impact our life. And I think we live in a time now where it is really down. I feel that we're a much more empowered society and the generation that's coming up after me, even more so.

And I still like real change will start to come as the millennials, the generation z-ers start to have a little bit more of the spending power because whilst we, I think, and I speak for myself, I can't speak for everyone. But once I feel that maybe previous generations are aware of things, but not quite sure what to do, the generation coming behind us, they are going to hold the feet to the fire of those responsible for making the world a better place. Now I have great hopes that things will improve as, as these people come up further in life.

Lisa Donnelly: Yeah, I think that's just the best possible note to end on, Louise. Thank you very much for joining us today.

Louise Hulland: Thank you. You're welcome. Thank you for having me.

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