



American ideals. Universal values.

January 20, 2015

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

As the first American President to attend India's Republic Day commemoration, you will have a unique opportunity to celebrate the shared values of our two democracies. In advance of your visit, I write to urge you to raise with Prime Minister Modi two issues of particular concern that you have staked out as central to your human rights agenda: ending modern-day slavery and protecting the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons. Your visit to India offers an opportunity to advance both of these key foreign policy goals while ensuring that the U.S.-India relationship is grounded in respect for human dignity and fundamental rights.

### **Combating Slavery**

Modern-day slavery is a huge and growing global criminal enterprise, generating an estimated \$150 billion in profits a year. And more people are enslaved in India than in any other country in the world. According to the U.S. State Department's 2014 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, India's primary trafficking problem is the forced labor of an estimated 20 to 65 million citizens: men, women, and children held in debt bondage—sometimes inherited from previous generations—who are forced to work in brick kilns, rice mills, agriculture, embroidery factories, and other industries. Victims tend to come from the most disadvantaged and vulnerable parts of society—Dalits, religious minorities, and women from excluded groups—and are often coerced through sexual and other violence.

Indian law enforcement tends to focus on victims brought into India from neighboring states, but 90% of slaves in India are Indian citizens. Prosecutions in domestic slavery cases are rare, and when they occur, victims are often vulnerable to intimidation and harassment. In India, as in many countries, perpetrators routinely act with impunity and victims rarely see justice.

The challenge is to change this calculus—to increase the risk of prosecution and decrease the profits for exploiters. The Indian government needs to strengthen anti-trafficking laws and promote consistent enforcement at all government levels. Additionally, U.S. corporations and financial institutions are significantly invested in India and have a substantial stake in ensuring these supply chains are free from forced labor. By leveraging these business relationships to better monitor suspect financial transactions, we could seize assets of proven traffickers and seriously damage the profitability of the enterprise. I urge you to press the Indian government to join with the United States in actions that will raise the cost of doing business for traffickers.

## Protecting the Rights of LGBT Individuals

The LGBT community in India is reeling after the re-criminalization of homosexuality just over a year ago. In December 2013, India's Supreme Court reinstated Section 377 of the Penal Code, a colonial-era law that criminalizes consensual sexual activity between men. Since then, gay men have once again found themselves vulnerable to prosecution based solely on their sexual orientation. There were approximately 600 arrests last year pursuant to Section 377, but because the law clusters consensual same-sex activity with sex crimes such as pedophilia and rape, it is difficult to know how many of those arrests were for consensual same-sex activities. Convictions under Section 377 can carry sentences as harsh as life imprisonment. I urge you to make clear to Prime Minister Modi that the United States opposes this discriminatory and unjust law which criminalizes members of the LGBT community. I ask that you urge Prime Minister Modi to work towards the repeal of Section 377 and the removal of any law or policy that further marginalizes LGBT Indians.

India and the United States share many mutual interests. To realize our common goals, this key bilateral relationship must be rooted in shared respect for the universal values of human rights. Your defense of these principles, publicly and in private meetings, during your visit to Delhi would strengthen the credibility of the United States and enhance our leadership.

Sincerely,



Elisa Massimino  
President and CEO

CC: The Honorable John F. Kerry, Secretary of State, U.S. Department of State  
Ms. Valerie B. Jarrett, Senior Advisor and Assistant to the President for Intergovernmental Affairs and Public Engagement  
The Honorable Nisha Desai Biswal, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State  
The Honorable Richard Verma, U.S. Ambassador to India  
Ms. Aditi Hardikar, Associate Director of Public Engagement in the Office of Public Engagement