



**The Aman Foundation**  
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I speak today, not only as a Business Leader and Chair of Aman Foundation, but as a member of civil society, as a human being, and especially, as a woman and a mother. Modern slavery is a flagrant violation of human rights. It represents an unseen stain on humanity that has sunk deeply into the fabric of our society.

Let me share a story about a little girl called Rukhsana. This 7-year old works at a brick kiln for 14 hours a day because her mother had taken a \$100 loan from the kiln owner for a medical emergency. Her mother was told that to work off her debt, she had to recruit her children as well. 20 years on, millions of bricks and countless beatings later, Rukhsana's entire family of 6 continue to work at the kiln and are still in debt, with no end in sight.

It is disheartening to see that in my country, Pakistan, over 2.1 million people are trapped in slavery. We are ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> on the Global Slavery Index. 62% of our population remains vulnerable to human trafficking, forced labor including children, child marriage and debt bondage.

There are countless Rukhsanas - shackled by their employers, mainly in sectors like brick kilns, agriculture, and other hard labor industries, to clear debts which overshadow their families. This is unacceptable. We simply cannot allow these injustices to continue!

Even though the Government has enacted several laws to control this epidemic, the challenge has been enforcement of policies necessary to punish businesses who profit from slavery – after all local and global businesses thrive on low-cost labor! The result has been that businesses are able to operate with an absence of accountability and transparency. Till we change the incentive structure that affects the supply and demand for forced labor, it will be very difficult to eliminate the ill of slavery.

On the supply side, the situation gets exacerbated due to the lack of financial empowerment and access to basic social services for the poorest. Vulnerability to enslavement is caused by poverty, illiteracy, inadequate healthcare, gender discrimination, rising unemployment, amongst many other factors. We need to have a holistic approach to tackle this issue.



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There is an inherent need to invest heavily in data collection and technology, and on rehabilitation and reintegration of victims back into society. The Government needs to focus on strengthening the criminal justice system to ensure that perpetrators pay a heavy price for their crimes.

Businesses must implement mechanisms to address the violation of workers' rights via company complaint processes to ensure feedback will remain anonymous without the fear of reprisal. If businesses can demonstrate that appropriate steps are taken to protect workers, then employees will be empowered to find solutions by exposing crimes.

Civil society has an instrumental role to play in lending a voice to the voiceless, and must demand that leaders fulfill their promise of ensuring every citizen is free from exploitation. Digital media is a powerful tool to raise awareness, create public outrage, and garner support to scale local initiatives. That is how citizens globally, especially youth, can provide independent oversight and advocate for redesigning incentive structures to discourage exploitation.

There also need to be investments in human development and cross-sector collaboration to reduce the supply of vulnerable workers. For example, our state-of-the-art vocational institute at Aman Foundation imparts not only technical, but also soft skills training to enable upward mobility of our youth. Our Healthcare Program encompasses a holistic ecosystem model, incorporating community health workers, primary healthcare facilities (including Mental Health and Emergency Services) - all to empower the most vulnerable in our communities.

This Forum is a major step towards ensuring that there is an effective nexus between all segments of society – not only Government and Business, but also development organizations, media, faith institutions, communities – to engender positive change. Only when we leverage the collective strength of our empathy, can we sustainably and systemically uproot this injustice.

We must act together, and we must act today!

**Fayeeza Naqvi**

Co-Founder & Chair, The Aman Foundation