

## About René Cassin

René Cassin works to promote and protect human rights in the UK drawing on Jewish values and Jewish experience. As survivors of intolerance, slavery and genocide, we believe that a 'Jewish voice for human rights' conveys both empathy and solidarity, and carries an authoritative weight of experience that adds force to advocacy and awareness-raising.

## Slavery and trafficking are unavoidably connected to Jewish experience.

During the festival of Pesach, the Jewish community remembers the pain of slavery. The foundational narrative of the Jewish people is one of a people led from slavery to freedom.

Although the word slavery conjures up historical images of Biblical slaves in Egypt before the Exodus, or the trans-Atlantic slave trade in colonial America and the British Empire, enslavement exists today in many forms. Modern slavery may not always involve shackles and chains, but there are actually more slaves today than at any point in human history. According to the [Global Slavery Index](#) there are an estimated 40 million people victims of modern day slavery, the vast majority – 71 per cent – are women and girls. It exists in many forms – including forced labour, forced marriage and human trafficking and in almost every country in the world.

Someone is in slavery if: they are forced to work - through mental or physical threat; they are physically constrained or have restrictions placed on their freedom of movement; and they are forced to work for little or no pay.

Described by Prime Minister Theresa May as the “great human rights issue of our time” there are an estimated 136,000 victims of modern slavery and human trafficking in the UK. Long term support for survivors is limited and many end up never fully recovering from their traumatic experiences, with an alarming percentage finding themselves back in slavery conditions again. For women, who face additional risks and vulnerabilities, this is particularly vital.

### Taking Action

As survivors of slavery in Egypt and in Nazi Germany, the Jewish community has a powerful voice in raising awareness of modern day slavery, and in helping those affected. As we celebrate our freedom this Pesach, we should remember the countless people around the world, including here in the UK, who do not share our good fortune. For in the words of William Willberforce's in his speech to the English Parliament in 1789 to bring an end of the slavery trade, “*you may choose to look the other way but you can never say again that you did not know*”. We must continuously draw on our Jewish values and build a community of support for those most marginalised in our society.

*Mia Hasenson-Gross is the executive director of René Cassin since 2015, bringing in-depth knowledge and experience of human rights education, campaigning and organisational development, acquired over 15 years working for Amnesty International.*

