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European Parliament
Rue Wiertz, 67
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Commissioner Cecilia Malmström

Brussels, 15 January 2019

Dear Commissioner Malmström,

Speaking at the Responsible Business Alliance (RBA) Regional Forum on Forced Labour in George Town earlier this week M. Kulasegaran, Malaysia's Minister of Human Resources, has declared "*war on forced labour*".

As I am sure you will be aware the situation in Malaysia in this respect is extremely concerning, in particular for migrant workers, with many documented cases of human trafficking, debt bondage, forced overtime, withheld wages and passport confiscation. Migrant workers are often unable to change employer or leave the country.

The Malaysian rubber sector has recently been subject to a thorough investigation from the press and CSOs, which exposed that companies resorting to such horrendous practices have been supplying the EU market, and in particular public bodies such as the NHS in the United Kingdom. Many other sectors of the economy are also concerned, such as electronics, automobile and wood.

In this context, Minister Kulasegaran's statement is much welcomed in that it opens a window of opportunity for the EU to step up its engagement with Malaysia on the issue of forced labour. Sadly there is currently little beyond rhetoric on offer from the Malaysian government to tackle the issue, and I would urge DG Trade to apply pressure in order to achieve concrete results.

Measures advocated by CSOs and human rights defenders active in the country include the repayment of the fees paid by migrant workers to recruitment and regularisation syndicates, the return of confiscated passports, freedom to change employer, genuine regularisation and delivering a living wage for all workers.

It is widely expected that the EU-Malaysia Partnership Cooperation Agreement could pave the way to the resumption of fully fledged trade negotiations. It is clear that such negotiations would be highly contentious in the absence of tangible progress on forced labour and human rights overall.

Yours sincerely,

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