



## *'We Are Not Merchandise': Modern Slavery and Children in Institutions*

### Concept note for a High-Level Meeting at the United Nations on 28 November 2017

#### The Problem

It is estimated that more than 8 million children live in orphanages and other institutions. More than 80 per cent of children in institutions are not 'orphans', but have families and are placed there due to drivers such as poverty, disability, marginalisation – and as a result of trafficking. Many of these children suffer forms of exploitation increasingly being recognised as modern slavery.

Over the past decade there has been a growing trend in young people from wealthy countries volunteering abroad, and well-meaning individuals or NGOs donating to orphanages. The money brought into a country through donations and volunteering can mean that orphanages are established simply to provide a volunteering experience, or to receive international donations.

Evidence from a number of countries across the world demonstrates that many families are coerced or deceived into placing their child in an institution. The culprits, often unscrupulous orphanage directors, profit from orphanages as moneymaking ventures. Once in an orphanage, children seldom receive the access to education or healthcare promised. More than 80 years of evidence demonstrates that orphanages seriously harm the health and development of children and expose them to greater risk of exploitation and abuse.

#### Aims of the High-Level Strategic Meeting

- Raise awareness of the link between institutions and modern slavery and implications for children;
- Highlight the 'business' that fuels this relationship and the commodification of children;
- Explore how current trends, such as international volunteering and social media, drive the phenomenon;
- Share contemporary evidence, challenges, and responses from countries across the globe;
- Provide examples of alternatives to institutional care and overcoming barriers to reform;
- Highlight the roles of different actors, such as governments, law enforcement, businesses, volunteers, faith-based communities and those currently funding institutions; and
- Discuss how the international community can better support vulnerable children.

#### About Lumos

Lumos, the international NGO founded by author J.K. Rowling, aims to end the institutionalisation of children by 2050. Lumos works with governments and partners to transform systems of family support in communities, reuniting children with families and enabling families to care for their children at home.