

# Design For Freedom

## Series 1 Episode 1

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Forced labour, child labour, building materials, supply chain, ethical decarbonization, circularity, regenerative materials, Grace Farms Foundation, Institute for Human Rights and Business, transparency, traceability, sustainable development goal 8.7, construction sector, global data, public demand.

### SPEAKERS

Elaine Mitchel-Hill, Sharon Prince, John Morrison

#### **Elaine Mitchel-Hill** 00:05

Hello and welcome to this first episode of the Design For Freedom podcast, which focuses on the elimination of forced and child labour in global building materials supply chains. Thank you for choosing to listen in as we dig into the uncomfortable truths about the global supply of critical materials and products that the construction sector relies upon and the challenges that persist. We aim to provide you with the insights, perspectives, information and tools that you need in order to take action to be part of the solution. Because actions, both big and small will move us in the right direction. I'm Elaine Mitchel-Hill, International Lead at Design For Freedom, a movement created by Grace Farms Foundation in 2020. Three principles underpin our mission to eliminate forced and child labour from the building materials supply chain. Firstly, to find and address forced and child labour, to pursue ethical decarbonisation, and also to prioritise circularity and the use of regenerative materials. By 2030 global spending and construction is set to reach \$17.5 trillion, but it's currently estimated that over 28 million people around the world are held in forced labour conditions, and many of whom extract the materials and make the products that go into our homes, schools, office buildings and landscapes. In this first episode, I want to share with you the context to lay out the human rights challenges that currently exist within the global construction sector, to share what inspired the Design For Freedom movement, to better understand how the sector has avoided scrutiny, to understand what is meant by the slavery discount, and importantly, to highlight what steps you can take right now. We'll hear from two giants in this space, Sharon Prince, CEO and founder Grace Farms Foundation, and the visionary and creator of the Design For Freedom movement. And John Morrison, Chief Executive of the Institute for Human Rights and Business with an incredible wealth of experience in human rights and construction across the globe. A huge welcome to you both. This is literally a joy for me to have you both here to share with our listeners the wisdom and insights that I know you hold. Sharon, firstly, thank you to you for this incredible opportunity to be part of the Design For Freedom team and to host what will be a fantastic first series of our podcast.

#### **Sharon Prince** 02:41

Well Elaine, our Design For Freedom podcast that will now mix both architectural design and human rights, fundamental freedom is already more palpable with your British accent and, of course, your material expertise. So who better for us to start off with also with you, John Morrison, the John Morrison of IHRB, as ultimately the Design For Freedom movement, right John, is a business issue which we will shortly delve into. So first, I also do want to note that you were the needle Elaine in the haystack on the other side of the pond, in the UK, in terms of

having this shared mission to unearth and end exploitation. I'm thinking about you in terms of your stone and your other building material expertise, as well as a human rights expert. So thankfully, our international acceleration has been amped up together with our team and so many others as partners in just less than a year.

**Elaine Mitchel-Hill** 03:48

Yeah, it has been absolutely fantastic. And when I met you Sharon, it absolutely was that kind of magnetic connection in terms of the focus that we both have on buildings, materials, you know, in supply chain. So it was amazing. So I have to ask straight from the get go for you to share Sharon with our listeners what the motivation was behind the Design For freedom Movement?

**Sharon Prince** 04:13

First of all, I should tell you that Grace Farms is where it germinated, and Grace Farms is a new kind of public place. It's a cultural and humanitarian centre just outside of New York City. It's where our commitment to architecture and design met our commitment to justice. And the impetus behind Grace Farms is that space communicates. And that is not really what predicated the idea. But what we know now every building does tell a story of humanity, and it's either of dignity or exploitation. Think about like this, that when one person is exploited to harvest the wood framing a building or lining interiors, or another person to extract the materials, the metals, the minerals creating the glass, solar panels, superstructures, the entire building does communicate injustice. So, it's back in 2017 when I was speaking with Bill Menking, he was the founding editor of Architects Newspaper, about how the entire ACE industry was getting a labour transparency pass. And the core question of Design For Freedom is, are buildings ethically sourced as well as sustainably designed? Because people we're speaking with are really the ones that care about sustainability. They certainly won't think about the ethical sourcing if they haven't already considered sustainability in the environment, and this was nowhere on the industry's agenda. So, people had already considered labour on the job site, but the other half of the labour inputs beyond the perimeter of the job site were yet to be examined. So, terms of both forced and child labour all along the supply chain. Lastly, I was thinking that as a social entrepreneur, I have been envisioning what can be before it exists, and then the creation that that part of it was so captivating. So, it was on the job site every week during construction that was completely enamoured. And it wasn't until after we opened though that I realised that there had been a massive difference that could have been made by simply asking the questions, where are all these building materials coming from, and who made them? The Design For Freedom movement, what we're doing now is creating this radical paradigm shift to remove force and child labour from the building materials supply chain, which is so weighty, just even to give you an idea of the beginnings we had, that was the question that was asked, and there was no answer. And I could pose this to leaders of industry who worked on Grace Farms with me. And then we launched the first ever Design For Freedom report for the industry in October 2020. Since then, we've been connecting the dots, surfacing facts and research, been convening leaders, launching pilot projects, because we want to demonstrate we're advocating for and then proposing strategies to hold leaders of the full ecosystem, of the build environment into account. And back then, at the beginning, people said, like that's we might want to start with one of those disciplines, and instead, really, we're all accountable, and it's been important to have everyone at the table.

**Elaine Mitchel-Hill** 07:28

And so important, I think that the questions that you raised, and you started to ask, and that resulted in Design For Freedom. Why do you think that so far, the construction sector has managed to avoid the same kind of scrutiny as fashion and food sectors?

**Sharon Prince** 07:44

Well, yeah, so there has been a great deal of awareness, as you know, in the food and clothing sectors going back decades, which has really somewhat changed the consumer preferences and actions. And we do know that fast fashion means that the underlying labour, the garments have been subsidised by forced labour. Here in the

United States, SNL even aired a pointed digital piece on fast fashion. So, it is known, but the construction sector has essentially been given a labour transparency pass. So, the way that we think about it is that first food was called to be accountable, then clothing, and next will be shelter. And the first two food and clothing are personal consumables. You can see the heat thus far has been directly in terms of construction, where we can see the building put together right on the job site. But the final consumable that we see and experience, we think we've already checked the box, and we look at the labour on the job site. So, I think that's part of it. The other part that we've seen, I think it's really significant, is that slavery does not reverse on its own, it does need intervention. In the construction sector, the sheer weight of it, at 13% of GDP, can make an impact, and that's why we're so impassioned about activating the construction sector at large. You can think about the materials too. 25% of textiles, all textiles go into construction, 38% of timber, 50% of copper and so forth. So, the sheer weight of these materials, if it was made with fair labour, would really impact millions of people. So, I think that this is really an important weighty area that I know John also has been researching individually in all these materials as well.

**John Morrison** 09:36

Absolutely Sharon, I mean, I think in a way, furniture and furnishings are the clothes that our houses wear inside, right? And it's always fascinated me that we ask so many more questions about the clothes we wear on our bodies, as opposed to the furnishings we hang in our houses, or the way we dress our beds or or sofas, etc, or the electronics that sit within our houses or enable our homes to regulate temperature, etc. If we wear the watch or if we have the laptop, maybe we ask ourselves some questions around conflict minerals, etc. But if they're embodied in our homes and our houses, somehow, they just feel that bit more removed from us, and we rarely ask the questions.

**Elaine Mitchel-Hill** 10:16

And Sharon, can you kind of help our listeners to better understand what the main challenges are that are found in supply chain. So what specifically are we dealing with?

**Sharon Prince** 10:26

Oh, yes. So essentially, you can think about, first of all the materials, what are the materials that we're talking about? So we create a list of 12 materials, and that's the issue that they're been dispersed with. They have 1000s of materials that go into a building, individually you can look at mining like we have the say, diamonds and so forth, yet we have not put that all together. The building industry itself, there's a study that notes of the \$500 billion of at-risk materials, four of the top six at risk are electronics, like you mentioned John, solar panels directly related to the built environment, textiles and timber. I mean the risk that the materials themselves are at risk. But also, the bigger issue is in terms of the business issue, is it going to be cut for people that are building? Is it going to cost us more? We already went through a whole scrutiny of environmental conditions that need to be met, and that costs more, lead certification, so forth. Now you're asking us to ensure there's fair labour. That astonished me at first, that people would ask that question, because we're talking about lives. Instead, want to reverse that thinking, and instead ask the question, are we willing to accept the slavery discount? Because we don't know the difference right now between fair labour with fair pricing and what we're paying now without scrutiny, that delta would be the slavery discount. It's time now to really start to change that thinking. I know personally, I don't want any of my materials to be subsidised with forest or child labour. And what happened here at Grace Farms is that we did seek LEED certification, both how we operate, we have double certification, how we operate and how we build. So, we're very aware of it. With some of the practices that we use, circularity, we use the wood that was spelled on site for all of our tables, so we know exactly who made those materials and where they came from. And there's some other materials as well, mass timber that's a way for, we talk like for ethical decarbonisation as a new term that we coined with the Yale Centre For Ecosystems and Architecture. And you have your book John on Just Transition, we want to narrow that down for the construction sector, to say we need to think about decarbonisation with an ethical lens. And in terms of doing that, FSC is something that just added core labour requirements a few years ago in 2021, so that is a double do, both for environment and for people, right for fair labour. And we have

mass timber in our own structure. So, we're able to see at Grace Farms, really, a lot of these elements, have they played out in the last decade? The main point is we need to know where our building materials are coming from, who makes them. We need to soon quantify what that slavery discount is.

**Elaine Mitchel-Hill** 13:21

And John so on from that point that Sharon just made, will increased scrutiny help to drive the elimination of forced labour in your view? Yes definitely. I mean, forced labour is as old as humanity. I mean, it's at least as old as classical civilisation. It has existed in different forms, in different times. We will know about the Atlantic slave trade, the Arab slave trade, Serfdom in medieval Europe, hideous forced labour that went on during the Second World War, etc. Unfortunately, as you said at the beginning, there are more people in forced labour today, in real numbers, than has ever been the case. It might not be life and death in every case, but it is clearly exploitation, and it meets the international definition, 28 million people. They're hiding in plain sight, really. And I think what we're beginning to see is more data, more transparency around the data. Beginning to see legislation too, the EU's timber regulation is driving traceability for timber going into the European Union and all of these measures, and we're seeing the same with forced labour and trade measures in the USA and in Europe as well. I think a combination of technology, better use of data, better incentives, whether they be laws or whether they be positive incentives, this is driving greater traceability. So, I think maybe for the first time in human history, we will begin to build an irrefutable database, if you like, of what's really going on and some of the root causes that sit in our supply chains. Up until recently, most companies, most CEOs, have been able to stand up and say, hand on heart, that they don't have child labour or forced labour in their supply chains. We know that any large company with a complex supply chain will have it there somewhere. It will be linked in some way to their global supply chain. And this is what we were talking about in Davos last month. That actually that's the sort of first step of realisation, is this understanding that everything is interconnected, and it's not a question of if it's there. The question is, are you going to find it? And if you do, what are you going to do about it, I think, and that's, that's where we meet, where, where the conversation is beginning to move. And John, Sharon's already mentioned your excellent new book, Just Transition. You wrote a chapter focused on transition in cities, and you call out construction and building materials. And I just wondered if you could share with our listeners your views on ethical decarbonisation.

**John Morrison** 15:46

Yes, absolutely. So there is obviously talk about decarbonisation in cities. And a lot of the big city movements, like C40, the Ilkley network of cities around the world, they all will have working programs on decarbonisation, they tend to focus more on the behaviour, I think, of citizens, you know, transport issues, energy use issues, for example, and maybe less on what you could call embodied carbon. You know, the carbon that's actually in the bricks, in the timber, in the concrete, in the mortar. But that is coming now, right? The calculation of the carbon footprint of the built environment has to be a mixture of not just how the people behave or how the workers behaved in carbon terms, but also how the supply chain behaved and how much carbon was released into the atmosphere or captured, because building can actually be part of the solution in carbon terms, not just part of the problem. Now, in a way, what we want to ask the same question now around forced labour, what does embodied forced labour look like in our buildings? It's hidden, you know, like the carbon is hidden, but it's embodied in the products that build our houses or dress our houses, or enable through technology, for our houses to work, and we want more transparency. The embodied carbon idea is intriguing to me, and I would call this embodied forced labour in our homes. Let's ride the coattails of the of the carbon awareness to ensure that we might be focusing on net zero by 2050, but a just transition requires that we take our supply chains with us on that journey.

**Elaine Mitchel-Hill** 17:24

And John, we're all very much aware of the geopolitical shifts that we're experiencing and the elevated dialog regarding metals and rare earth minerals, and the fact that construction accounts for, I think it's about half of the

world's copper usage. Can you share with us your views on the likely impact for those working in supply chains for rare earths, for metals, given that demand is set to increase exponentially by 2050.

**John Morrison** 17:52

Yeah, I wish I'd written the book now. I only published it four months ago. A lot has happened in the past four months to raise awareness around transition minerals, whether it be Greenland, Ukraine or wherever else we're talking about. I was in Saudi Arabia in January for the Future Minerals Forum, where the Saudi government is trying to bring together governments from all over the world, but particularly from Africa and Latin America, to talk about the supply chains for transition minerals, and you've mentioned the copper one, right? So copper, as Sharon said, is half of the world's copper is used in homes and houses, but the predictions are now that we will need to dig out of the ground more copper by 2043 than has ever been dug out of the ground in the whole of human history, and remind ourselves that we had a bronze age which was practically premised named after our use of copper. But so, so, and that's just copper, right? So rare earth minerals, lithium, cobalt, etc. There is now this rush on to securitise supply. Everybody wants it. What's interesting, a lot of the copper is dug out of the ground in Latin America and certain parts of Africa, but the majority of it goes to China for smelting. The same with rare earth metals, etc. What you tend to see is that supply chains are bunched together in certain locations, because the processing of metals is a messy business. We have not wanted it in our backyards. Now, suddenly we do so the relocation of supply chains is going to take time. But you know, full traceability of where the transition minerals come from in our buildings is not there. The standards are different at the mine site from the standards that are applied at the building site in most cases when it comes to these social issues. Very few commodities have what you could call full vertical integration, and that is something we're working hard on, as well as horizontal integration, to make sure that the initiatives that are taking place on copper or gold or tungsten or manganese or lithium or you know that they're joined up right, that we're not reinventing for each of these commodities. And that we're linking the environmental issues with the social issues, like forced labour. There's a lot of money that could be saved, I think, through a better use of auditing, a better use of data, better use of technology, economies of scale, but I do think the traceability push is coming, as I mentioned in timber, is certainly beginning to come on transition minerals. People want to know where the transition minerals are, and they want to know how they can secure them for building and other reasons.

**Sharon Prince** 20:27

So John, can I chime in here for a minute? Because it was a conversation we had, you had brought together mineral experts, and the copper mark was just, just starting to operate, and at that point, out of 500 mines or so, there's about 36 of them. I think this was a really promising start to have that transparency exam, you know, have the examination of the mines from the extraction level. And the other interesting thing that we discussed is that 47% of those mines are adjacent to First Nations and 67 to bio sensitive areas. So, when we expand the use and the need for copper to meet the you know, for these transition minerals, it's going to impact the environment and people and culture as well.

**John Morrison** 21:20

Absolutely, yes. The majority of these unlined transition minerals are adjacent to either indigenous land or subsistence farmers around the world, because these are the marginal lands where these minerals and rocks are more likely to be. So, there's no coincidence that there's a huge correlation. But if you take The Copper Mark, for example, and we've worked with The Copper Mark, and we think it's a good initiative, and it does look at social standards and forced labour, but it only looks from the mine to the smelter. It doesn't link the smelter to the house. And if you think, I believe the average home in North America and Europe requires 200 kilograms of copper per home, your listeners should write in and tell me if I've got that number right, but there's a lot of copper per home, right?

**Sharon Prince** 22:11

For any building, right?

**John Morrison** 22:13

Any building yeah, no one has any idea where that copper comes from, right? No one does. I mean, you could possibly trace it back to the fabricator or the smelter in some cases, but you can't, it's very hard, almost impossible, to trace that back to the mine, right? It's, there's a big black box that sits on our supply chain. Now that hasn't mattered really. We've had mass balance approaches to most commodities, but suddenly it is mattering. And as I said, the events of the past four months have suddenly made everyone aware that it does matter where stuff comes from. You need security of supply for a whole range of reasons, and part of that is other human beings that sit within your supply chain,

**Sharon Prince** 22:50

Right. And there's also some standards that are not even applied to one of the, a few of the materials that are so prominently used in the built environment, one being glass. Glass does not have an equivalent of a standard for fair labour. And here it is, ironically, it's glass should have transparency. Bricks, there's only one very small Nepalese standard also. These are ubiquitous materials that are used with little means for transparency, but we need to spur on that ability to have transparency. And also, to go back to your very important point of that we're working on global data transparency. To me, to use the data for transparency is essential in terms of construction too many materials to be able to assess adequately, and the global flows in materials right now are part of that opacity.

**Elaine Mitchel-Hill** 23:46

And Sharon, it's clear that the construction sector and those spelling the built environment ecosystem could and should do more to play their part in ending slavery. Who do you want to take action and specifically, what do you want them to do? What can our listeners do?

**Sharon Prince** 24:03

Okay, so the first thing that everyone can do is examine one of the materials that you purchase, that you procure, whether it be a chair, there could be a chair that you put into a building. You need to ask the questions of where these materials come from and who's made them. That's the easiest, and secondly, if you use circularity, you've already truncated the supply chain at the distractive. So, these are very simple things you can start doing today. And then we also have avenues for several of them to start adopting Design For Freedom principles. We have 100 within our working group, with many companies, both large and small that span the ACE industry and we also have competitors, which is also something to really acknowledge that this movement is coming from within the industry. These are all people using their pro bono time and hiring other people within their companies as well to start to adopt Design For Freedom in principles broadly and also apply them to projects. So, we have that toolkit that you helped also Elaine put into play for an international upgrade. There's not only the guidance that's in there that John you also have contributed piece to, but also the tools. And one of those tools, interestingly, our team put together an interoperability chart for tech platforms and AI that we can then use to adopt at different points along the, what is a long process right, for building. So that's another very plausible way, some are open, we show some that are open and available to you to use. And we also have a summit that's coming up, thank you, John for coming. It was exciting about this is we're able to pair leading human rights experts to be able to come, also Grace Forest of Walk Free, who produces the global slavery index. We also have Baroness Young, who opened our entire toolkit too, who's a leading expert of UK as well, and Hugh Evans, CEO and Founder of Global Citizen, which galvanizes millions to end extreme poverty and to defend the planet which are essential to Design For Freedom movement. So, we have also all the leaders within the industry to help really be able to unfold this together. It's a summit, not a conference, because these are all leaders who have been committed to accelerating the movement from a standstill, and so it's pretty remarkable. So, these are all many ways to start engaging.

**Elaine Mitchel-Hill** 26:30

I have a question to put to you both, so I'll come to you, John first. So, the explicit aim of sustainable development goal, 8.7 is the elimination of slavery by 2030. John, what do we have to do collectively to have any chance whatsoever of achieving that goal?

**John Morrison** 26:48

I'd say this about all of our goals. We can't think about 8.7 outside of all of the issues around fair labour and fair work under SDG 8, and you can't think about SDG 8 in isolation of all 17 SDGs, because we work, we live in a systemic, interlinked world, right? And when we look at the root causes of forced labour, if you really ask the question, well, why is this problem getting worse, not better? Why is the number getting bigger not smaller, you begin to scrape away at the data, the inconvenient truth emerges right, of why it is actually convenient for so many people to pretend that it's not connected to your supply chain, that it doesn't exist, that it's only about brick kilns in India, and it's over there, not over here, etc. So, I think there's the emergence of an irrefutable data set. And I think this is where technology will help us, there will be irrefutable data on how we're all linked to forced labour emerging over the next few years. And then the questions for CEOs in the construction sector, and I would say particularly in the construction sector, because I think the construction sector has an easy ride on these questions. The question will be, it's there, what are you going to do about it, the data, the evidence is there that is now likely, the risks of this are likely to be somewhere in your supply chain. And I would say, don't wait until this evidence emerges. The irrefutable data set emerges, embrace it now. I mean, take the leadership that Sharon herself has taken here, and step up and say, be ahead of this. Be Known as one of the key leaders that is navigating away through complexity, the fact that we are linked to this, and the data is there. And I think eliminating forced labour in the next five years by 2030 is a tall order, but I do think that the data is coming, and for the first time in human history, we will have an irrefutable data set upon which we need to act. And then it is a question of being held accountable to that whether you be a government, whether you be a business leader, or whether you be a civil society leader, we all have to act together. That's what excites me, despite all the challenges that actually we will have a case to answer in the next couple of years, I think.

**Elaine Mitchel-Hill** 29:03

And Sharon, what from your perspective, what do we have to do collectively to give us any chance of achieving that goal?

**Sharon Prince** 29:11

Well, first of all, John well said, I don't know if I need to add anything else, that was quite a summary. It is literally in just a few sentences to wrap up. Is that we all have agency to Design For Freedom and to build a sustainable and equitable world with every decision we make, and we are doing that. The thing about this is that we are either creating, in terms of the construction sector, a building with that does demonstrate dignity or exploitation, whether people acknowledge it or not, and those stories remain. We know how the pyramids were made, and this is 1000s of years later. We know how the White House the United States was made, these stories do not go away. It is literally plausible to get to the goal to end and eradicate forced labour, which is plausible when we have transparency, and actually more so when we all make the decision and use the agency we have. Literally that's why we are committed to public demand too, we have a public place. We have an exhibit that shares with this very close issue to everyone right here, and we are hopeful that message accelerates at a speed that would meet that mark with all of us together, right. Main point is that we do have agency, and we need to use it.

**Elaine Mitchel-Hill** 30:36

And John, what changes would you hope to see, or would you like to see in the next two or three years? And kind of added on to that, what direct action can our listeners take as far as you're concerned?

**John Morrison** 30:48

I think, start asking the questions, be curious. Be curious about where the commodities come from, where the building materials come from, whether you be the user, you know, whether you live in the built environment, or whether you be a builder yourself. Whatever your role in business might be, be curious before you are required, right? And I think the age of requirements is coming, it's going to be driven, as I say, by data and technology, I think. And so get ahead of that. And I suppose that the parting thing I want people to have in their heads after listening to our discussion today is curiosity. Find out more about the commodities and the building materials you're using. It's interesting, right? It's interesting to know about copper and its history and but it's also illuminating to find out where commodities are coming, where are they traded? How are they traded, and who are the people that are caught up in all of that, who might be vulnerable to exploitation in those processes.

**Sharon Prince** 31:41

I concur with you on curiosity, I've been it's just like you have down supply chains and what you find is literally dignity, which I did in Haida Gwaii, but also exploitation, which is heartbreaking. And I think that is the opportunity that we all have to be curious and then take action. To me, this is the time, if there ever was one,

**Elaine Mitchel-Hill** 32:05

A huge thank you to my guests, Sharon Prince and John Morrison, you've got us off to a brilliant start by outlining both the context and the mission. You both continue to be an inspiration to me and to many of our listeners. Thank you for being so generous with your time and knowledge, and thanks to you for listening. Please do join me next time in our second episode, where we'll be digging into the issues of the data that companies hold and how that could be used to accelerate the realisation of Sustainable Development Goal 8.7, the eradication of forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking and child labour. Our lens, of course, will be the built environment and building material supply chains. You can download the Design For Freedom international guidance and toolkit for free online at [designforfreedom.org](https://designforfreedom.org). The Design For Freedom movement was created by Grace Farms Foundation. You can follow us at DFF Movement on Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube. The Design For Freedom podcast is a Research Podcast production.