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## **DOL Child Labor List Released**

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Today, the US Department of Labor (DOL) <u>released a list</u> [1] of goods believed to have been produced using forced or child labor globally. The list includes a number of industries where the International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF) has identified these labor rights abuses to occur including cocoa, cotton, tobacco and rubber.

As part of the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2005 (TVPRA of 2005), DOL's Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) was tasked with "develop[ing] and mak[ing] available to the public a list of goods from countries that the Bureau of International Labor Affairs has reason to believe are produced by forced labor or child labor in violation of international standards." ILRF is pleased to see that this useful resource has been publicly released after years of work.

Since 2001, ILRF has been pushing US-based cocoa importers and chocolate companies like Hershey to take effective action to end the use of child, trafficked and forced labor on West African cocoa farms. ILRF Executive Director Bama Athreya said, "By including cocoa on the list of products made by child labor, the US government has acknowledged the lack of progress the chocolate industry has made in eliminating serious labor rights abuses in this sector, despite years of promises." Recent events confirm the appropriateness of including cocoa on the list. In June of this year, INTERPOL rescued children in Cote d'Ivoire who had been trafficked from neighboring countries as part of an ongoing system of trafficking and forced labor in the West African cocoa industry.

ILRF has also been working to stop forced and child labor in the cotton industry globally, especially in Uzbekistan. Reports published by ILRF and its global partners have confirmed the ongoing removal of thousands of children from schools across Uzbekistan who are forced to pick cotton during harvest season.

The inclusion of tobacco on the list indicates that the US government believes that industry efforts to eliminate child labor in this sector have not been sufficient. Labor rights abuses in tobacco production continue in countries like Malawi where a recent report by PLAN International found that thousands of children as young as five work on tobacco estates and suffer nicotine poisoning from being exposed to the equivalent of 50 cigarettes a day.

Other additional products that ILRF included in it's testimony to the Department of Labor that appear on the official list are: cotton from Tajikistan, cottonseed and stones from India, sugarcane from Guatemala and surgical instruments from Pakistan. ILRF also has a long history of working to eliminate child labor in the soccer ball industry in India.

Commenting on the importance of the list, **Brian Campbell**, **ILRF Director of Policy and Legal Programs**, said, "This list is a critical tool that consumers and businesses can use to identify the sectors where forced and child labor abuses continue. As I stated in ILRF's <u>testimony</u> [2] to the Department of Labor last year, this list helps to focus attention on problematic sectors and the challenge now is to implement business practices that lead to a higher labor standards and living and working conditions for workers."

Bama Athreya added, "We hope that the Department of Labor will continue to welcome additional information regarding the sectors included on the list as well as other industries using forced and child labor. A regular, at least annual, update of this list will help to show progress or lack thereof in addressing these abuses and identify new areas on which to focus."

Now that the list has been published, a Consultative Group established as part of the Farm Bill [3] in 2008 will work to "develop the recommendations for best practices for the voluntary, third-party certification initiative" to ensure that agricultural products imported or sold in the US are not made by child labor. ILRF hopes that the members of the Consultative Group will be announced shortly and that this body will work swiftly and effectively to ensure that child and forced labor is eliminated from the production of US agricultural imports, especially cocoa, cotton, tobacco and rubber.

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The International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF) is an advocacy organization dedicated to achieving just and humane treatment for workers worldwide. For more information, please visit <a href="https://www.LaborRights.org">www.LaborRights.org</a> [4]

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## Links:

- [1] http://www.dol.gov/ILAB/programs/ocft/tvpra.htm
- [2] http://www.laborrights.org/../../../default/files/publications-and-resources/ILRFDOLListTestimony.pdf
- [3] http://www.laborrights.org/../../../../stop-child-labor/child-labor-free-certification-initiative
- [4] http://www.laborrights.org/../../../..