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Harkin-Engel Protocol on Chocolate and Child Slavery Set to Expire on July 1

Human Rights Groups Say the Chocolate Industry Broke Its Promise to Eradicate Illegal Child Labor from Chocolate Production; Call for Legislation

San Francisco, CA – July 1, 2005 will mark the expiration of the Harkin-Engel Protocol, a voluntary protocol agreed to by the chocolate industry to ensure U.S. chocolate products aren't made using illegal child labor. Eyewitness reports from the field confirm that the industry has failed to fulfill its promise to monitor and certify by July 2005 that the cocoa it imports is not made by forced child labor. Thus, Global Exchange, an international human rights group based in San Francisco, and the International Labor Rights Fund, an advocacy organization based in Washington, DC, are calling on the US government to step in and end the use of illegal child labor by the U.S. chocolate industry.

A recent investigation by Natacha Thys of the ILRF confirmed that there is little happening on the ground and the problem continues unabated. "The chocolate industry has had four years to eliminate illegal child labor from its supply chain," said Ms. Thys. "What's holding back progress on illegal child labor is nothing more than the industry's unwillingness to support real solutions and exchange a small portion of its massive profits to ensure a sufficient return for farmers and workers."

The Harkin-Engel Protocol was prompted by media exposés in 2001 by Knight Ridder and others that made public the existence of child slavery on Ivory Coast cocoa farms, and created an avalanche of negative publicity and consumer demands for answers and solutions. Two members of the U.S. Congress, Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) and Representative Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.), took up the issue by adding a rider to an agricultural bill proposing a federal system to certify and label chocolate products as "slave free." The measure passed the House of Representatives and created a potential disaster for Mars, Hershey's, Nestle and other major chocolate manufacturers. To avoid legislation that would have forced chocolate companies to label their products with "no slave labor" labels (for which many major chocolate manufacturers wouldn't qualify), the industry agreed to a voluntary protocol to end abusive and forced child labor on cocoa farms by 2005.

According to the protocol, the chocolate industry was to develop and implement credible, mutually acceptable, voluntary, industry wide standards of public certification, which would take effect by July 1, 2005. Despite this commitment, there has been almost no progress in the design and implementation of a monitoring or certification program. "Americans do not want to eat chocolate that was made with illegal child labor or slave labor. No chocolate can taste good that was made under such conditions. It's time for Congress to take action to mandate industry action. And until then, people should seek out Fair Trade chocolate—that is, chocolate which has been certified by an international monitoring group to meet certain labor, wage, and environmental standards," says Jamie Guzzi of Global Exchange.

Copies of the Harkin-Engel protocol and a recent report on the protocol by Global Exchange are available at <http://www.globalexchange.org/cocoa>

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