

International Labor Rights Forum

ILRF is an advocacy organization dedicated to achieving just and humane treatment for workers worldwide. This resource, created by Mike Schultz, is part of ILRF's Labor Rights in the Classroom resource page for educators. For more information or resources, please visit <http://www.laborrights.org/labor-rights/labor-rights-in-the-classroom>.

The Toronto Star

July 4, 2005

Child labour feeds chocolate trade

Cocoa plantations still employ kids

TODD PITTMAN
ASSOCIATED PRESS

OUME, Ivory Coast—The message has travelled down red earth roads to tropical forests where green, fist-size cocoa pods hang from lush trees: Stop child labour on cocoa plantations, or the world may stop buying your cocoa.

But four years after the chocolate industry, under pressure from U.S. lawmakers, agreed to create standards to stamp out the worst practices, many children still labour to help produce 70 per cent of the world's raw material for chocolate.

"When I go to my fields, I take my children with me," said Guy Maxime Heritier, an Ivorian farmer who spent 10 hours Thursday with his sons, 10 and 12, hacking weeds with machetes and planting. "They need to learn the trade. If I'm not here tomorrow, what are they going to do?"

Child labour has traditionally raised few eyebrows in Africa, where profound poverty and lack of schools mean children are often called upon to help support families. And while rare, forced labour and child-trafficking do exist in Ivory Coast, the world's Number 1 cocoa producer, said Nissoti Diaby of the German aid group, GTZ.

Reports that children were being trafficked and forced to work in dangerous conditions on African cocoa plantations prompted two Democratic congressmen to negotiate a 2001 agreement to end the practice.

The deal was endorsed by Ivory Coast and signed by industry giants, including the U.S.-based Chocolate Manufacturers

Association, whose members represent more than 90 per cent of the chocolate processed in the United States.

The agreement was not legally binding, but it gave a deadline that expired Friday to "develop and implement credible, mutually acceptable, voluntary, industrywide standards" to certify cocoa beans are processed without any of the worst forms of child labour — putting children to work using large machetes, spraying poisonous pesticides and carrying heavy loads.

Critics argue the chocolate industry failed to meet that deadline because although standards have been established, they have not been widely implemented.

The industry says it met the deadline in Ivory Coast by setting up a pilot monitoring project in May in Oume district, where farmers and children are visited by government inspectors who first explain child labour laws, then return to ensure communities are adhering to them.

The differing opinions have arisen out of how to define the 2001 deal.

Bama Athreya, deputy director of the Washington-based International Labor Rights Fund, said the agreement to create standards on eradicating child labour meant developing a functioning certification system: labels affixed to chocolate products declaring they weren't produced with child labour.

Susan Smith of the U.S.-based Chocolate Manufacturers Association said proving that would be impossible.

Billions of cocoa beans are exported from more than half a million small farms in Ivory Coast alone, and there's no way to monitor every farm 24 hours a day.

Ivory Coast officials agree.

"You can't stand behind them all day while they're working," Bredou said.

About 70 per cent of the world's cocoa supply comes from West Africa, much of it originating in Ivory Coast.

Keen to protect an industry that brings in 20 per cent of national revenue, the Ivorian government set up the pilot project with the International Labour Organization in six villages in Oume with a total population of 35,000. A similar project is under way in neighbouring Ghana, the Number 2 producer.

Ivorian officials say convincing farmers hasn't been easy.

"It's hard for them to understand, because they've always worked with their children, and now we're saying don't do that," said project chief Georges Atta Bredou. "But when we say they'll stop buying your cocoa, your profits will be zero, the message starts to get across."

A preliminary project report that surveyed 500 children in Oume showed that 383 of them worked "temporarily or permanently" on cocoa plantations.

Most were working on farms with parents, but 7 per cent had "no family link with their employers and could be victims of child labour," the report said. Thirty per cent had never attended school. Some, like Heritier's sons, go to school several days a week and work the rest.

"It takes time to change mentalities. It's not quick or easy work to convince them," Bredou said. "The farmers tell us, 'Sure, we'd rather send our kids to school, but we don't have the means.'"

The legal working age in Ivory Coast is 14. But in Oume, dishevelled children

could be seen walking down roads returning from cocoa, rice and manioc fields, some carrying machetes half their size.

Some of the \$2-million project fund was set aside to build schools and pay school fees, Bredou said. Farmers will have to hire adult manpower in place of their children. But officials say a major injection of aid will be needed to produce real change.

"The basis of this problem is poverty," said Amouan Assouan Acquah, who heads the national monitoring commission overseeing the Oume project. "It will cost money to expand this program, and who will pay for it?"

International Trade Chocolate Manufacturers Group Intervenes In Suit on Côte d'Ivoire's Forced Child Labor

Daily Report for Executives No 28 page A15

February 11, 2005

By Rossella Brevetti

The Court of International Trade has granted the Chocolate Manufacturers Association request to intervene as a defendant in a case brought by the International Labor Rights Fund (ILRF) against the government, seeking to compel enforcement of laws prohibiting imports of goods made with forced child labor, ILRF announced Feb. 9 (International Labor Rights Fund v. United States, Ct. Int'l Trade, No. 04-005432/1/05).

At issue in the suit is cocoa imported from the Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)--the world's largest exporter of cocoa, providing approximately 40 to 43 percent of the world's supply in recent years. In its motion to intervene, CMA, the premier trade group for cocoa distributors and manufacturers in the United States, said that it previously made a public commitment to ensure that cocoa growers observe internationally recognized labor standards and that barring Ivorian cocoa would have a destructive effect on that nation.

In October 2004, ILRF, Global Exchange, and the Fair Trade Federation filed suit against the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection alleging that it failed to enforce laws protecting U.S. consumers from goods made by forced child labor. The ILRF had filed a petition with Customs on May 30, 2002, requesting an enforcement action under Section 307 of the 1930 Trade Act barring imports of goods made with forced child labor, but Customs did not undertake an investigation.

ILRF's press release said that 2001 media reports exposed the use of child labor in West African cocoa production. ILRF's independent investigations in Côte d'Ivoire found that child labor continues to exist on cocoa farms producing for export to the United States.

ILRF blasted Customs for not taking any action on its petition. "This unreasonable delay in investigating cocoa imported from the Ivory Coast has caused millions of dollars' worth of cocoa produced by forced child labor to be imported into the U.S. to the detriment of those domestic importers who observe the law, hundreds if not thousands of children trafficked into slavery in Ivory Coast, and domestic labor rights advocacy associations," the complaint alleged.

The complaint seeks declaratory and injunctive relief.

CMA Certification Program

CMA's commitment to seeing that cocoa growers observe internationally recognized labor standards was formalized in a protocol signed by some members of Congress and other persons. CMA and its partners undertook various initiatives under the protocol, which CMA said are playing a vital role in developing a certification program.

"Barring Ivorian cocoa would have a significant destructive effect on the farming families who depend on that cocoa for their livelihood," the CMA motion stated. "In addition, it would undermine the cooperative, protocol-based process. If successful, Plaintiffs' actions would not only be counterproductive to the progress CMA and its partners have made to date, but also detrimental to the work that needs to be done. It would also deny CMA's members access to their primary raw material input."

However, ILRF's Bama Athreya charged that the chocolate industry "clearly believes that enslaving children is an acceptable cost of business in order to continue to reap enormous profits."

"If companies were serious about eliminating child labor from their supply chain, they would not be going to this unusual length to ensure non-enforcement of the law," Athreya said in the ILRF press release.

ILRF will file a response to Customs' motion to dismiss on Feb. 22.

Cocoa Industry Labor

(Retrieved from <http://www.cargill.com/news/issues/cocoaindustry.htm> on August 7, 2006)

Cargill's position on cocoa industry labor

Cargill is committed in all of our businesses to being a leader in corporate citizenship and to enriching the communities where we live and work. As a measure of our commitment, Cargill has joined other members of the global chocolate and cocoa industry to promote efforts to improve growing and production practices and to work towards the elimination of abusive or enforced child labor in cocoa production.

Cocoa beans are harvested from the fruit pods of the tropical evergreen cacao tree that can only be grown within 20 degrees latitude of the equator. Nearly 70 percent of the world's cocoa production originates from West Africa with Cote d'Ivoire alone accounting for 40 percent. An estimated 10 million people in West Africa are supported by over 1.2 million independent family cocoa farms. Cocoa is produced primarily by independent family farm with family members providing the farm labor. Children have traditionally worked as part of the family unit on these farms.

In 2002, the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) completed a survey to determine the extent of child labor in the cocoa sector. The survey found that family labor was the primary source of labor in the West African cocoa sector, the majority of children working on cocoa farms were working on their own family's farm, and that the types of dangerous situations that children were being exposed to involved handling sharp machetes and exposure to pesticides. The survey also found that children were hampered by a general lack of educational opportunity. Of those surveyed, roughly 4 percent of children working on cocoa farms had no family ties to the farmers, and the survey found that these children were more at risk of being exploited.

The use of child labor in cocoa is primarily a function of a farmer's income. Although cocoa usually provides more than 50 percent of household income for West African cocoa growers, it is a labor-intensive crop with low yields. In addition, excessive local taxation of cocoa, barriers to selling directly to exporters of cocoa by local governments, a lack of a communications infrastructure to broadcast cocoa market prices in up-country regions, and civil unrest and violence are all factors that can constrain the price farmers receive for their cocoa. As a processor and exporter of cocoa in Cote d'Ivoire, Cargill purchases close to 50 percent of our cocoa beans from farmer cooperatives and provides transparent information about world market prices as a direct means to increase farm income. Although Cargill does not buy cocoa directly from farmers, we are able to leverage our relationships with farmer cooperatives to partner on sustainable cocoa practices and child labor.

Since 2001, we have been running seminars to train our suppliers to go back to their communities to teach their neighbors about sustainable cocoa practices. The seminars include a component on child labor. In addition, beginning with the 2004/2005 growing season, Cargill requires that all of our direct suppliers of cocoa beans in West Africa, both licensed buyers and cooperatives, sign a statement acknowledging that they understand that Cargill is committed to the elimination of abusive child labor practices in the cocoa supply chain and that their supplier contract is subject to termination if we find they are employing abusive child labor practices.

Other initiatives

Part of being a good citizen is giving back to your community with financial resources, time and talent. To that end, in Cote d'Ivoire, Cargill has supported several initiatives:

- We sponsor the organization 'Chaine Des Tout-Petits' in carrying out an immunization program for more than 33,000 children in Abidjan, San Pedro, Daloa and Gagnoa, protecting them from diseases such as meningitis, tetanus and intestinal parasites.
- Our employees in Cote d'Ivoire have helped build Habitat for Humanity houses in the Gagnoa region, with plans for 20 new houses this year. We provide ongoing support to this program.
- We support the World Food Programme's (WFP) efforts to achieve sustainable food security for children in Cote d'Ivoire. Our funding is used to help prevent and treat intestinal parasites in children, in conjunction with the WFP's school feeding programs.

For more information on our Citizenship commitment, please visit <http://www.cargill.com/about/citizenship/citizenship.htm>

In addition to Cargill's individual efforts on child labor in cocoa, through our trade associations, the Chocolate Manufacturers of America, the European Cocoa Association, and the UK-based Biscuit, Cake, Chocolate and Confectionery Association, we committed to an unprecedented and historic agreement in 2001. The Harkin-Engel Protocol dedicated industry to specific actions to ensure that cocoa is produced responsibly, without the use of abusive child labor. Members of the United States Congress and U.S. governmental agencies, the International Labor Organization (ILO), non-governmental organizations (NGO's), trade associations, other relevant third party stakeholders and the Cote d'Ivoire government witnessed this protocol.

To ensure that abusive or enforced child labor in cocoa farming is eliminated, and to help alleviate rural poverty, the protocol outlines a four-step approach. Each step is described below:

1. [Help "at-risk" children](#)
2. [Develop a credible "certification" program to drive continual improvement in cocoa farming labor practices](#)
3. [Improve the well being of the farming community](#)
4. [Support the International Cocoa Initiative \(ICI\) – a joint foundation between industry and non-industry stakeholders](#)

Help "at risk" children

ILO/West Africa Cocoa/Agriculture Project (WACAP) – part of the International Program to End Child Labor (IPEC)

- Fosters developmental, economic alternatives to keep children from re-entering abusive labor situations
- Expands knowledge base on labor issues; raises awareness
- Currently underway in Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Cameroon, Nigeria

Winrock CLASSE Project – Addresses access to education

- Keeps children in school via improved facilities and curriculum
- Expands teaching to include "life skills" training – provides economic alternatives, greater opportunity
- Active in Cote d'Ivoire

Develop a credible "certification" program to drive continual improvement in cocoa farming labor practices

Establishment of a government-endorsed system of continuous improvement through monitoring, independent verification, corrective action and regular reporting, with the goal of compliance with ILO Convention 182.

Improve the well-being of the farming community

The well being of children depends upon the well being of the farm community: helping farm families improve their livelihood is an important part of ensuring that cocoa is grown responsibly.

A number of programs are being managed through the Sustainable Tree Crops Development Program (STCP), a strategic development alliance between farmers, the global chocolate/cocoa industry, governments, research institutes and the public sector.

Cocoa "Farmer Field Schools" are providing farming families with knowledge and training to boost their incomes – while promoting responsible labor practices (ILO/STCP)

- Focus on improved productivity, safety, sustainable farming
- Active in cocoa regions throughout West Africa

STCP/SOCODEVI cooperative programs help to organize farmers, provide them with better growing techniques and market information to earn more for their crop

- Preliminary reports show substantial income gains for participating farmers – up to 100 percent increase

Using the power of radio to reach farmers in remote areas – raise awareness of labor issues, help farmers grow cocoa responsibly

Support the International Cocoa Initiative (ICI) – a joint foundation between industry and non-industry stakeholders

Solidifies the partnership between industry and non-industry stakeholders

- Board composed equally of industry and non-industry

Supports field projects – acts as a clearinghouse for best practices to help eliminate abusive and enforced child labor practices in cocoa

Strong focus on community-based initiatives at the farm village level

Progress towards the goals of the protocol can be found at www.responsiblecocoa.org