

WHERE DOES ALL OUR CHOCOLATE COME FROM?



IVORY COAST – THE CURRENT SITUATION ON CHOCOLATE AND CHILD TRAFFICKING

- ▲ **Cote d'Ivoire is a country in the west of Africa, which produces more than 35% of the world's cocoa crop.**

In 2001 reports confirmed widespread child labor on cocoa farms in Cote d'Ivoire and thousands of children being trafficked from nearby Mali, Burkina Faso and Togo. The conditions these children were working in was characterized as dangerous and they were forced to work long hours. ¹In 2002 a study by the Sustainable Tree Crops Program of the Institute of Tropical Agriculture of Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea and Nigeria claimed that there were at least 284,000 children working in the West African cocoa industry. The majority of these (200,000) were to be found in Cote d'Ivoire. A substantial minority of these child laborers were discovered to have been trafficked from Mali, Burkina Faso and Togo. The ILO is in the process of commissioning new studies to verify this research. Despite this fact, the ILO does not dismiss the findings and considers them as a part of the evidence of widespread child trafficking to the cocoa industry. 153,000 children were found to be forced to apply pesticides without protective clothing, and 64% of the children on cocoa farms were under the age of 16. 40% of child laborers were girls.

Although migrating to another place to work, and the use of child labor on West African cocoa farms is traditional and often happens on family farms, there is evidence of forced child labor and victims of the crime of human trafficking, which is an abuse of this tradition.

²As a result of these accusations US Senator Tom Harkin and Representative Eliot Engel proposed a bill, which would require the chocolate industry to certify all their chocolate as "slave free." The cocoa industry successfully lobbied against this on the premise that the supply chain for cocoa is very complex with middlemen buying the beans and mixing them before selling them on to conglomerate buyers such as Nestle, ADM and Cargill. NGOs such as the International Labor Rights Fund argued that as these three controlled the market they could very well determine under what conditions they bought the beans.

¹ The most prominent of these was the BBC report "Mali's children in chocolate slavery" <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1272522.stm>

² Child Labor in the Cocoa sector of West Africa STCP 2002 and referenced in Combating child labor in cocoa growing, ILO 2005.

³An argument was made to say that many families employ their own children on farms so that they learn skills for the future. This is a good cultural argument, but if it leads to children not receiving an education then it must be challenged and it of course does not apply to trafficked children.

In 2001 a compromise was reached dubbed the Harkin Engel Protocol. ⁴Under this agreement the cocoa industry committed to introducing a certification program voluntarily which would cover all of West Africa by July 1st 2005. This has clearly not been achieved. There have been some pilot projects, some education co-operation, but little else. Industry agreed to certify half the cocoa growing areas in Ivory Coast and Ghana by July 2008, but on closer inspection this was only a promise to gather data on the situation, not an actual certification of farms. Although it is true that cocoa is produced in more than 1.5 million farms across West Africa, it is surely unacceptable to endorse a monitoring system, which will never visit the majority of the farms, which may employ child labor and trafficked children.

▲ **What progress has actually been made?**

The International Cocoa Initiative, a partnership of labor unions, NGOs, cocoa processors and the major chocolate brands, targeted 24 Ghanaian communities for its pilot phase. ICI's program is community driven, sensitizing cocoa farmers to abusive labor practices and identifying how to ensure these practices are brought to an end. Some key results and achievements of the pilot phase which was completed early 2007:

- ▲ In 21 communities, children are no longer involved in spraying of cocoa
- ▲ 19 communities have taken measures to reduce the load children carry
- ▲ In all communities, parents and guardians have started providing protective clothing for children when they accompany them to the farms;
- ▲ 20 communities have taken measures against children breaking pods
- ▲ In 21 communities, the Traditional Labor Cooperation has been revived, thereby allowing children to go to school
- ▲ 21 communities officially requested teachers, 13 were granted
- ▲ 13 communities had employed supporting teachers, paying them directly

³ Tulane Report, p49: If a child is trafficked, the child's presence in a household may be explained by 'family ties' even if the child is not related.

⁴ Chocolate Manufacturers Association Protocol for the growing and processing of Cocoa Beans and their derivative products in a manner that complies with ILO convention 182 concerning the prohibition and immediate action for the elimination of the worst forms of child labor.

⁵In 2008 the ICI scaled up, working with 154 communities in Ghana and 88 in Ivory Coast. With an estimated 12,000 cocoa producing communities in Ghana, and 18,000 in Ivory Coast, the ICI program seems like good work, on a small scale. Furthermore, Anti-Slavery International's director Aiden McQuade states: "While ICI, in parallel with its more general child labor focused approach, has undertaken positive initiatives with the police and others on trafficking, there is a high risk that without a more systematic approach to trafficking that this most serious of problems will be inadequately unaddressed." The scale of failure to come to grips with the problem becomes clear when the original commitment made under the Harkin-Engel Protocol is considered:

"By July 2005, the industry in partnership with other major stakeholders will develop and implement credible, mutually-acceptable, voluntary, industry wide standards of public certification, consistent with applicable federal law, that cocoa beans and their derivative products have been grown and/or processed without any of the worst forms of child labor."

⁶ The industry has passed the deadline and has not come anywhere near meeting these standards.

Unless industry can assure us that our chocolate is not made from beans picked by trafficked children, then no real progress has been made. This should be the standard by which they are judged.

⁵ Combating child labor in cocoa growing, ILO 2005.

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