

February 14, 2022

VIA CBP PORTAL

Mr. Chris Magnus
Commissioner, U.S. Custom and Border Protection
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20229

Re: **Request that you enforce the law to stop forced child labor in cocoa harvesting**

Dear Commissioner Magnus,

Congratulations on your appointment and best wishes in addressing the many challenges you face.

We, the undersigned, are writing to ask you to take long overdue action to address an urgent problem of ongoing forced child labor in cocoa harvesting in Cote d'Ivoire. Two years ago, on February 14, 2020, International Rights Advocates and Corporate Accountability Lab filed a petition under Section 307 of the Tariff Act of 1930 ("the Petition") asking that U.S. Custom and Border Protection (CBP) take action, as provided for in its legislation, to ban the importation of cocoa by nine specific companies¹ with clear records of harvesting cocoa with forced child labor in Cote d'Ivoire. The Petition provided official, undisputed reports confirming massive numbers of child laborers in cocoa harvesting and supplemental evidence that many of these children are trafficked and forced to work on cocoa plantations. This past summer, on June 25, 2021, the Petitioners submitted a supplemental petition to CBP providing further evidence of trafficking and forced child labor in the Ivorian cocoa industry. This petition looked not just at specific instances of forced labor, but also documented new information about the manner in which child trafficking occurs, including through which border crossings, and identified specific actors involved in the trade. In our view, the inaction on the Petition is allowing horrific forced child labor to continue in cocoa harvesting and sharply conflicts with stated U.S. government policy.

We draw to your attention the following facts:

- Clear evidence has been submitted to CBP documenting widespread, ongoing use of forced and trafficked child labor in harvesting and processing cocoa in Cote d'Ivoire, West Africa.
- The U.S. Department of Labor and U.S. State Department have both clearly documented the trafficking of children and forced child labor in the Cote d'Ivoire cocoa sector.
- The Child Labor Cocoa Coordinating Group Annual Report provides ample evidence of forced child labor in the cocoa industry.
- Reports from the Fair Labor Association, civil society groups, academics, as well as news reports, have documented evidence of forced child labor in the cocoa industry for years.
- The Department of Labor has since 2008 published an annual list of products made with forced and child labor. Cocoa from Cote d'Ivoire has been on the list every year.
- ILO Convention 182 regarding the Worst Forms of Child Labor, ratified by the U.S. in 1999, prohibits forced child labor. Young children are incapable of consenting to carry out hazardous labor. Child labor that requires children to work at the expense of their health,

¹ Nestlé, Cargill, Barry Callebaut, Mars, Olam, Hershey, Mondelēz, World's Finest Chocolate, Inc., and Blommer Chocolate Co.

schooling, or well-being must be considered forced. The documented conditions of the children working in the cocoa industry in Cote d'Ivoire are well within the ILO's indicators of "forced labor." Child workers are inherently vulnerable and carry out hazardous work, including using machetes, carrying heavy loads, and spraying pesticides.

- In 2020, the U.S. Department of Labor released a study it commissioned by the University of Chicago's NORC Institute finding that there are **1.56 million** children harvesting cocoa in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana, and 95% of these children, **1.48 million**, are performing hazardous work that violates ILO Convention 182's definition of the Worst Forms of Child Labor and meets the ILO's indicators of forced labor.

Thus the U.S. government has officially established and condemns that forced child labor is involved in harvesting cocoa in Cote d'Ivoire.

For over 20 years the chocolate industry has exerted its power and influence to prevent the U.S. government from taking action to end the industry's use of child labor. In 2001, to defeat a pending U.S. law to regulate the companies' supply chains, the chocolate industry signed the Harkin-Engel Protocol, a "voluntary" initiative that gave the participating companies until 2005 to "phase out" their use of child labor. Two decades later, the chocolate industry has failed to take the necessary action to achieve their "voluntary" target and has given itself endless, self-serving, unilateral extensions.

The chocolate industry's "voluntary" plan and public relations statements that it will end its use of child labor have zero credibility. The industry puts out contradictory messages, admitting on the one hand its use of child labor and pledging to end it. On the other hand, it argues in a pending federal case that it has no more responsibility for ending forced child labor in cocoa harvesting than a kid buying a candy bar at a store, the claims of eight former child slave laborers against the chocolate companies should be dismissed, and the chocolate companies granted impunity.²

Under CBP regulations, 19 C.F.R. § 12.42, if a Petition establishes that there is "**reason to believe**" cocoa from Cote d'Ivoire was produced by forced child labor, this allows CBP to "**reasonably but not conclusively**" find that cocoa from Cote d'Ivoire is produced by forced child labor and issue a Withhold and Release Order (WRO) stopping the importation of cocoa from Cote d'Ivoire. This threshold has been clearly and irrefutably established by the Petition. The issuance of a WRO would require any importing company to establish "by satisfactory evidence that [its] merchandise was not ... manufactured ***in any part*** with" forced child labor.

The chocolate companies would then at long last be required to demonstrate whether they are profiting from forced child labor and to take real action to end it. Many of the responsible companies loudly proclaim there is no forced child labor in their cocoa supply chains. If they can't, after 20 years of promising, prove this essential fact, they should not be extended the privilege of access to the U.S. market. The Petition suggested a flexible approach as to the timing of the requested WRO, and we are confident that giving the companies notice that a WRO is coming on a specific date will be the push needed to shift the cocoa industry from vague and empty promises to concrete action.

² See Defendants' Joint Motion to Dismiss, ECF No. 27-1 at p. 11, *Issouf Coumbaly, et. al.v. Cargill Inc., et. al.*, Civil Action No. 21-0386 (D.DC 2021).

However, CBP has for the past two years taken no enforcement action based on the strong evidence presented in the Petition. It has taken no action to enforce the clear prohibition in the legislation on importing cocoa harvested by forced child labor. It has taken no action to implement the clear, strong policy of the U.S. government to prevent this continuing abuse of children. If CBP continues to decline to take action, this would send a message that the U.S. Government is turning a blind eye to the known use of forced child labor.

We recognize that the chocolate industry has enormous economic and political power and that the children being exploited and trafficked as child laborers do not. However, the law and policy of the United States is to protect children forced to work, and this should be especially true when they are being exploited by large multinationals that made a written promise over 20 years ago to stop this horrific practice.

We call on you to put the lives of millions of children in West Africa ahead of the business interests of the chocolate industry. We call on you to enforce the law you are sworn to uphold to free these children from forced labor. We call on you to demonstrate that the U.S. Government's policy that it will not tolerate forced child labor is genuine and serious.

We await your response with strong hope. Please direct your response to the Petitioners, Terry Collingsworth (tc@iradvocates.org) and Charity Ryerson (charity@corpaccountabilitylab.org).

SIGNED:

Terrence P. Collingsworth
Executive Director
International Rights Advocates

Charity Ryerson
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Corporate Accountability Lab

* Institutions listed for identification purposes only.