

Published on *International Labor Rights Forum* (<http://www.laborrights.org>)

[Home](#) > Labor and Consumer Groups Call on US Government to Improve Procurement Tool in the Fight Against Forced Child Labor Globally

Labor and Consumer Groups Call on US Government to Improve Procurement Tool in the Fight Against Forced Child Labor Globally

Date of publication: December 6, 2011

Source: Press Release

Author: International Labor Rights Forum & Green America

US Gov Spends Billions Each Year on Secondary Products Like Chocolate and Uniforms Potentially Made with Exploitative Child Labor; Groups Seek to Close Loophole and Prevent Contractors From Potentially Selling Goods Made with Forced Child Labor to the Government

WASHINGTON, D.C.-- This week a coalition of twenty-four organizations representing organized labor, religious communities, socially responsible businesses, and consumers shared with the US Department of Labor [a vision](#) ^[1] on how the US Government could do more to ensure that taxpayer dollars don't support forced child labor. The groups have requested that the Government require its suppliers who provide goods potentially made with forced child labor to screen their suppliers and root out any who may use forced child labor.

The groups included the American Federation of Labor-Congress of International Organizations (AFL-CIO); American Federation of Teachers; Cal Poly Chocolates; Child Labor Coalition; CREA: Center for Reflection, Education and Action; Ethix Ventures; Equal Exchange; Fair Trade Federation; Fair Trade Resource Network; Fair World Project; Global Exchange; Green America; International Labor Rights Forum; Labor-Religion Coalition of New York State; Media Fair Trade/Untours; Organic Consumers Association; Presbyterian Church (USA), Office of Public Witness; Project Hope and Fairness; Stop the Traffik; SweatFree Communities; Sweet Earth Organic Chocolate; Unitarian Universalist Service Committee; United Methodist Board of Church and Society; and United Students for Fair Trade.

The US Government has begun to take steps to make sure that US taxpayer dollars are not used to purchase goods made with forced child labor. In 1999, President Clinton issued Executive Order 13126, which requires federal contractors who supply products on a list developed by the Department of Labor to certify that they have made a "good faith" effort to determine whether forced child labor was used to produce the items. In advance of a Department of Labor deadline for comments, the coalition submitted a proposal outlining how the Order could be strengthened to better meet its goal of ending forced child labor in the areas of both cocoa and cotton production.

"Mostly due a loophole in the regulations, companies that supply goods to the US Government that may contain as a valuable component a good made with forced child labor -- such as chocolate bars made with cocoa from Cote d'Ivoire or uniforms made with cotton from Uzbekistan -- have not been required to

implement any good faith efforts to identify and root out forced child labor from their supply chains, even as the US Government continues to report serious forced labor problems in those industries,” said Brian Campbell, Director of Policy and Legal Programs of the International Labor Rights Forum. “By making a small change to how the products are identified by the Department of Labor on the procurement list mandated by Executive Order 13126, the US government will be taking a significant step toward ensuring that US taxpayer dollars flow to producers, including those in Cote d’Ivoire, who are committed to responsible business practices, and stop flowing to producers who use forced labor, like the Government of Uzbekistan.”

In Uzbekistan, between 1.5 to 2 million children are forced by their own government to harvest cotton each year for export to the world market. If they refuse, they face beatings, expulsion from school, and other government-imposed penalties. In Cote d’Ivoire, UNICEF estimates 35,000 children, many from nearby countries of Mali and Burkina Faso, are trafficked to work on cocoa plantations far from home where they face crippling isolation, beatings, and other forms of coercion to grow cocoa for our chocolate bars.

“Increasingly, US citizens are taking action as consumers on the widespread problems of child labor in the cocoa and cotton industries,” said Green America Fair Trade Campaign Director Elizabeth O’Connell. “They want to see that their government is fully taking steps to address the issue of child labor as well, and strengthening enforcement of the President’s Executive Order 13126 would go a long way in preventing the US Government from purchasing products tainted with forced child labor, and providing a better life for children in the affected countries.”

Last year, the US Government spent \$43 million on chocolate and \$1.9 billion on apparel and uniforms. By applying the procurement policy to products made from cocoa (rather than only to the raw cocoa) and to textiles, apparel, and uniforms (rather than only to cotton) the US Government would send a clear message to its contractors and have more leverage in ending forced child labor in its supply chain.

###

INTERNATIONAL LABOR RIGHTS FORUM is an advocacy organization dedicated to achieving just and humane treatment for workers worldwide. www.LaborRights.org [2]

GREEN AMERICA is the nation’s leading green economy organization. Founded in 1982, Green America (formerly Co-op America) provides the economic strategies, organizing power and practical tools for businesses and individuals to solve today’s social and environmental problems. www.GreenAmerica.org [3]

Resources:

[Full text of the comments](#) [1]

[Video: “Kids Hard At Work In Uzbekistan’s Cotton Fields”](#) [4]

Source URL: <http://www.laborrights.org/stop-child-forced-labor/news/labor-and-consumer-groups-call-on-us-government-to-improve-procurement->

Links:

[1] <http://www.laborrights.org/sites/default/files/publications-and-resources/EO%2013126%20Comments%20FINAL%20DOL-2011-0006.pdf>

[2] <http://www.LaborRights.org>

[3] <http://www.GreenAmerica.org>

[4] <http://www.cottoncampaign.org/2011/12/04/kids-hard-at-work-in-uzbekistans-cotton-fields/>