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US Department of Labor Lists Cocoa, Cotton and Other Goods as Products Made by Forced, Child Labor

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Today, the US Department of Labor (DOL) released its second list of goods believed to have been produced using forced or child labor globally. DOL also releases its 2010 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor and a list of products produced by forced or indentured child labor as required by Executive Order 13126. The list of goods includes a number of industries where the International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF) has identified these labor rights abuses to occur including cocoa, cotton, tobacco and rubber.

As part of the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2005 (TVPRA of 2005), DOL's Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) was tasked with "develop[ing] and mak[ing] available to the public a list of goods from countries that the Bureau of International Labor Affairs has reason to believe are produced by forced labor or child labor in violation of international standards." ILRF is pleased to see that USDOL has published a second edition of this useful resource. A continued commitment to updating the list will help consumers and businesses received timely information and identify sectors that require particular focus.

Since 2001, ILRF has been pushing US-based cocoa importers and chocolate companies like Hershey [1] to take effective action to end the use of child, trafficked and forced labor on West African cocoa farms. ILRF Campaigns Director Tim Newman said, "By including cocoa [2] on the list of products made by child labor, the US government has acknowledged the lack of progress the chocolate industry has made in eliminating serious labor rights abuses in this sector, despite years of promises."

ILRF has also been working to stop forced and child labor in the cotton industry [3] globally, especially in Uzbekistan. Reports published by ILRF and its global partners have confirmed the ongoing removal of thousands of children from schools across Uzbekistan who are forced to pick cotton during harvest season. While many of world's largest retailers have agreed to address the severe abuses associated with Uzbek cotton in their supply chains, the children's clothing store Gymboree remain silent on this issue despite requests from consumers and shareholders for the company to take action on this issue.

Other additional products that ILRF has publicly identified potentially produced by forced and/or child labor that appear on the official list are: cotton from Tajikistan, cottonseed and stones from India, rubber from Liberia, sugarcane from Guatemala, surgical instruments from Pakistan and tobacco from Malawi. ILRF also has a long history of working to eliminate child labor in the soccer ball industry in India. The fact that

many of these products have been listed by USDOL for the second time indicates that stronger efforts are urgently required to end egregious labor rights abuses in these sectors.

Commenting on the importance of the list, Brian Campbell, ILRF Director of Policy and Legal Programs, said, “This list is a critical tool that consumers and businesses can use to identify the sectors where forced and child labor abuses continue. The challenge now is to implement business practices that lead to higher labor standards and living and working conditions for workers.”

Tim Newman added, “We support USDOL in its efforts to identify products imported to the United States made using forced and child labor. We hope that future iterations of USDOL’s list of goods will continue the work of this year’s report in expanding the number of countries that are investigated in the creation of the list.”

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The International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF) is an advocacy organization dedicated to achieving just and humane treatment for workers worldwide. For more information, please visit www.LaborRights.org [4]

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