

# The Advocates Post

The Advocates for Human Rights works locally and globally to fight injustice, restore peace, save lives and build the human rights movement.

## Category: Child Labor

Featured

### Trick or Treat? The True Cost of Chocolate

(<https://theadvocatespost.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/child-labor.jpg>)

*Daniel Rosenthal/laiif/Redux Image source (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/09/30/lawsuit-your-candy-bar-was-made-by-child-slaves.html>)*

(<https://theadvocatespost.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/image1.jpeg>)

While my son is getting ready to head out tonight to harvest Halloween candy, excited by the chance to lug a pillowcase full of chocolate bars around the neighborhood, I've been thinking about the children who harvest the cocoa that goes into the chocolate in his bag.

Because while he finds an evening of hauling candy a treat, I know that for the millions of kids his age working in the cocoa industry it's anything but fun.

Research funded by the U.S. Department of Labor estimates that **more than 2 million children are performing hazardous work in the cocoa industry**

([http://childlaborcocoa.org/images/Payson\\_Reports/Tulane%20University%20-](http://childlaborcocoa.org/images/Payson_Reports/Tulane%20University%20-)

<http://www.dol.gov/ilab/issues/child-labor/cocoa/> in the West African countries of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, which account for about 58% of the world's cocoa production. (<http://www.dol.gov/ilab/issues/child-labor/cocoa/>)

The cocoa industry in these countries relies heavily on work performed by children, some as young as 5 years old, including WFCL (shorthand for the “worst forms of child labor” as defined by international law).

The work is dangerous, and it's especially hard on children's bodies.

*“Working on cocoa farms can be hazardous, particularly for children, whose physical, mental, and psychological capacities are still developing. Children working in cocoa may work long hours, carry heavy loads, and use dangerous tools. Children may also be involved in spraying cocoa trees with pesticides or burning fields to clear them.”* (<http://www.dol.gov/ilab/issues/child-labor/cocoa/>)

A Tulane University report (<http://childlaborcocoa.org/index.php/2013-14-final-report>), commissioned as part of the accountability framework for the 2001 Harkin-Engel Protocol that was meant to end abuses in the industry, lays out the issue:

*“Fifteen years ago, the West African cocoa sector came under increased scrutiny after media reports revealed incidences of child trafficking and other labor abuses in cocoa farming. On September 19, 2001, representatives of the international cocoa/chocolate industry signed the Harkin-Engel Protocol. Signing this agreement as witnesses were U.S. Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) and U.S. Representative Eliot Engel (D-NY), the Government of Côte d'Ivoire, the ILO, and representatives of civil society. Based on ILO Convention 182, the Protocol's principal goal was “to eliminate the worst forms of child labor (WCFL) in the cocoa sectors of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.”*

**Remarkably, child labor in the cocoa industry has continued to proliferate despite the signing of the Harkin-Engel Protocol in 2001.** In 2008, DOL estimated that 1.75 million children (<http://www.dol.gov/ilab/issues/child-labor/cocoa/>) were working in West African cocoa production. By 2013-14, that number had risen to 2.26 million children, including 2.03 million children found to be performing hazardous work (<http://childlaborcocoa.org/index.php/2013-14-final-report>) in cocoa production in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana.

The Tulane University study of the sector (<http://childlaborcocoa.org/index.php/2013-14-final-report>) released in July 2015 found the following:

- Côte d'Ivoire, the world's leading cocoa producer, experienced large growth in cocoa production from 2008-09 to 2013-14.
- Total output rose by over half a million tons, or over 40%.
- The population of children 5-17 years living in agricultural households in Côte d'Ivoire's cocoa-growing regions grew by about 180,000, or 5%.
- The numbers of children working in cocoa production, doing child labor in cocoa production, and doing hazardous work in cocoa production grew by 59%, 48%, and 46% respectively.

**What's driving the growth?**

In short, it's us and our demand for cheap chocolate. The problem, of course, is that it's not easy to harvest cocoa. It's heavy, dangerous, delicate work. Fields must be cleared, planted, and tended. When the cocoa pods are ready, they must be harvested by hand, split open, and the seeds removed for drying. It's time-consuming, labor-intensive work.

That kind of labor should come at a significant cost. But as with so many commodities, the prices are kept low by squeezing labor out of workers who are largely invisible to consumers through a complicated supply chain structure. Consumer-facing companies are driven by the competing demands of delivering rock bottom prices and sky-high profits. Those with massive buying power – like Mars, Hershey's, and Nestlé – are able to bid down the prices of commodities like cocoa with their suppliers, who make up for low prices by paying less – or sometimes nothing at all – for the work.

Supply chain dynamics are of growing concern in the anti-trafficking movement. The seriousness of the global supply chain's impact on workers was highlighted in the State Department's 2015 Trafficking in Persons Report (<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/245365.pdf>), and 2010 legislation in California, the Transparency in Supply Chains Act (<http://www.dol.gov/ilab/child-forced-labor/California-Transparency-in-Supply-Chains-Act.htm>), now requires certain companies to report their specific actions to eradicate slavery and human trafficking in their supply chains.

We see the effect of this kind of price pressure on wages here in the United States. Retail cleaners in Minnesota, for example, have been squeezed by the low contracts bid by stores which result in wages as low as \$4 per hour. Workers organized by CTUL have set a November 10 strike deadline (<http://ctul.net/>) for contracted cleaners. Farmworkers in Florida's tomato fields (<http://www.foodchainsfilm.com/>), facing the same structural barrier to fair earnings, used pressure on major retailers to increase the per/pound rate for tomatoes by \$.01, resulting in a substantial step toward a fair wage.

But the kids harvesting cocoa don't have that option. Sometimes sold for the equivalent of \$30, sometimes kidnapped, they don't have the power to stage a boycott.

That's why earlier this fall a lawsuit (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/09/30/lawsuit-your-candy-bar-was-made-by-child-slaves.html>) alleging the use of the worst forms of child labor in the production of Nestlé ([http://www.hbsslaw.com/Templates/media/files/case\\_pdfs/Chocolate%20Slave%20Labor/09-28-15%20%28Dkt%201%29%20Nestle%20Complaint%20%282%29.PDF](http://www.hbsslaw.com/Templates/media/files/case_pdfs/Chocolate%20Slave%20Labor/09-28-15%20%28Dkt%201%29%20Nestle%20Complaint%20%282%29.PDF)), Hershey's, ([http://www.hbsslaw.com/Templates/media/files/case\\_pdfs/Chocolate%20Slave%20Labor/09-28-15%20%28Dkt%201%29%20Hershey%20Complaint%20%282%29.PDF](http://www.hbsslaw.com/Templates/media/files/case_pdfs/Chocolate%20Slave%20Labor/09-28-15%20%28Dkt%201%29%20Hershey%20Complaint%20%282%29.PDF)) and Mars ([http://www.hbsslaw.com/Templates/media/files/case\\_pdfs/Chocolate%20Slave%20Labor/09-28-15%20%28Dkt%201%29%20Mars%20Complaint%20%282%29.PDF](http://www.hbsslaw.com/Templates/media/files/case_pdfs/Chocolate%20Slave%20Labor/09-28-15%20%28Dkt%201%29%20Mars%20Complaint%20%282%29.PDF)) chocolate products was filed by consumers in California. It's not the first time that the companies have faced litigation over their labor practices ([http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/sep/02/child-labour-on-nestle-farms-chocolate-giants-problems-continue#\\_=\\_](http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/sep/02/child-labour-on-nestle-farms-chocolate-giants-problems-continue#_=_)), but

this class action is the latest effort to pressure the chocolate industry to fix a problem it has known about for more than a decade (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/09/30/lawsuit-your-candy-bar-was-made-by-child-slaves.html>).

Forced labor yields approximately \$50 billion in profits annually ([http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS\\_243391/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS_243391/lang-en/index.htm)) according to estimates by the International Labour Organization. Included are profits derived from what are considered the worst forms of child labor, or WFCL, such as that used in the cocoa industry.

There are bright spots: While the number of children in West Africa's cocoa production increased in the past five years, Ghana actually managed to reduce (<http://childlaborcocoa.org/index.php/2013-14-final-report>), albeit slightly, its numbers during that period.

So what will I do this Halloween? I'm not entirely sure. But I know I'll start with a conversation. To end this problem of child labor in the cocoa industry, more consumers need to know about the true cost of the chocolate they are buying.

By Michele Garnett MacKenzie

([http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/michele\\_garnett\\_mckenzie](http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/michele_garnett_mckenzie)), *The Advocates for Human Rights' Director of Advocacy*

**More Resources to Learn about Child Labor in the Cocoa Industry:**

**The Dark Side of Chocolate** (<http://www.thedarksideofchocolate.org/>) – 2010 documentary by Miki Mistrati & U. Roberto Romano. In 2012, they produced a follow-up film called **Shady Chocolate** ([http://www.shady-chocolate.com/en/front\\_uk](http://www.shady-chocolate.com/en/front_uk)). The Shady Chocolate website includes an interactive cacao map and information how to write letters to the industry (<http://www.shady-chocolate.com/en/skriv-til-industrien>) via the International Cacao Initiative.

**Slave Free Chocolate** has a list of ethical chocolate companies (<http://www.slavefreechocolate.org/ethical-chocolate-companies/>). **Food Empowerment Project's Chocolate List** (<http://www.foodispower.org/chocolate-list/>) is also available as a free smartphone app.

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