

Child Slavery in the Cocoa Industry

The last few weeks of the world's financial markets have certainly been remarkable. It seems that every day there are new developments that will either ruin or rescue the whole mess. These events are generating a lot of concern, and with good reason, the Australian market lost \$73 billion in just two days affecting millions of people's superannuation accounts and share portfolios. One of the dangers in all of this is that we will forget those who were already vulnerable before all this happened.

Sadly there are many in this world that find themselves vulnerable, often for reasons beyond their control. Recently I learned of one particular issue I would like to share – child slavery in the cocoa industry.

Most of the following information is from the World Vision webpage dontradelives.com.au.

About 70% of the cocoa beans used to make chocolate around the world come from West Africa, with Ivory Coast and Ghana among the biggest producers.

Harvesting cocoa is intensive, backbreaking work and cocoa prices have been declining in recent years. To keep costs down, farmers traditionally use their children and other family members to help. Tragically, the low prices offered for cocoa has led to the exploitation the worlds most vulnerable, resulting in what is basically child slavery.

Criminal networks have been caught moving children across regions and international borders to work on cocoa farms. World Vision even learned of one trafficker who smuggled children into the Ivory Coast by faking a convoy of ambulances containing healthy children who were bandaged to fool authorities.

Today there are hundreds of thousands of children working on cocoa farms in the Ivory Coast and Ghana. Some of these cocoa children routinely carry heavy loads, and work with fire, chemicals and knives, with little or no protection. Many of them have no chance of going to school.

The cocoa industry is a 71 billion dollar industry. It seems unthinkable that all this wealth is being generated at the expense of children but sadly this is the case.

What's the chocolate industry doing about it?

In September 2001, members of the chocolate industry signed a voluntary protocol known as the "Harkin-Engle Protocol" after the two U.S. Congressmen that initiated the industry reform. The protocol aimed to establish credible standards of public certification that ensured cocoa production was free of forced labour and the worst forms of child labour in the Ivory Coast and Ghana.

The first steps was to survey farms representing half of the cocoa production in Ghana and the Ivory Coast and certify they were free of the worst forms of child labour. These survey results were then to be independently verified. This process was to be completed by July 2005. The industry failed to meet that deadline.

The cocoa industry was given an extension until July 2008. But now, three years later, they have missed their second deadline, failing to have the survey results independently verified by 1 July 2008. World Vision is calling on the Australian chocolate industry to commit to a detailed, fully funded plan of action by 1 December 2008 that will stop child labour and exploitation in cocoa production.

World Vision is asking the chocolate industry to take the following steps;

- Address the issue of **fair pricing for cocoa farmers**
- Support community management of local development to promote **community wellbeing**
- Invest in **improved community services**
- Ensure **sustainable cocoa production** and farming practices
- Ensure that all Australian chocolate manufacturers who are Confectionary Manufactures of Australasia members participate in **ethical certification schemes**
- **Commit enough money** to the process – just 1% of industry revenue in Australia
- **Be accountable** to the Australian public

How can we help?

It is easy to become overwhelmed by the injustice of issues such as this, what can we as individuals do? As consumers we often have more power than we realise. The problems in the cocoa industry will only be addressed when there is a change in public attitude.

The first thing we can do to bring about this change is inform those around us about what is going on, quite often it is not apathy but a lack of public awareness that allows injustices such as these to continue.

The second and perhaps most important is to let the chocolate industry know how we feel about the issue. World Vision has drafted an electronic petition to send to the Australian Chocolate industry asking them to commit the 1 December 2008 deadline. To sign this petition and learn more about this issue and others go to dontradelives.com.au.

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