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INTERNATIONAL LABOR RIGHTS FORUM

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Migrants Trafficked, Beaten, and Forced to Work for Free on Plantations Linked to Procter & Gamble

ILRF filed a [Tariff Act petition](#) together with Rainforest Action Network and SumOfUs, urging U.S. Customs and Border Protection to seize shipments of palm oil harvested under forced labor conditions by Malaysian grower FGV. FGV is a business partner of Procter & Gamble – the maker of Pantene shampoo, Olay lotion, and Gillette shaving cream. The complaint decries the system of violent debt bondage and human trafficking, where traffickers lure migrant workers from countries like Indonesia and the Philippines to FGV plantations in the Malaysian state of Sabah with promises of good jobs. Once trafficked to Sabah, the workers were informed that their wages will be withheld until they pay off the cost of their transportation, leaving them to subsist on credit from the company which only adds to their debts. The people who objected were met with violence. Both the [Washington Post](#) and [Reuters](#) covered our complaint and Tenanganita, our partner in Malaysia, gave press interviews. To sign SumOfUs' petition, [click here](#).



Forced Child Labor in Cocoa; Twenty Years of Failure

ILRF applauded a letter from Senators Sherrod Brown and Ron Wyden calling for U.S. Customs and Border Protection to investigate forced child labor in West African cocoa production. ILRF also urges industry leaders to make a binding commitment to ensure adequate financing for solutions that are developed through a transparent process, negotiated in collaboration with farmers, farm worker organizations, and child rights advocates. For further information, see the [Washington Post's](#) coverage and Judy Gearhart's op-ed, "[Forced Child Labor in Cocoa; Twenty Years of Failure](#)," published by Morning Consult. For Halloween chocolate minis, we recommend [Divine Chocolate](#) and [Equal Exchange](#).



Forced Labor Documented in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan's Cotton Harvests

The annual cotton harvest is in full swing in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Independent monitors from the Cotton Campaign's partners [Turkmen.news](#) and the [Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights](#) are documenting and reporting on state-sponsored forced labor of public employees.

The Campaign celebrated the release of Gaspar Matalaev, who served three years in jail in retaliation for a report on the country's cotton harvest. Meanwhile, there is growing support for the [Turkmen Cotton Pledge](#), which has been signed by 70 major brands who refuse to source cotton from Turkmenistan until forced labor is eliminated. Eighty-four investors with more than \$859 billion in assets under management have also taken a stand by signing an [investor statement](#) urging companies to take steps to stop forced labor in the cotton harvest by signing the Pledge.



In Uzbekistan, reforms are under way, although reports from the field indicate ongoing [challenges](#) to the implementation of those reforms remain. The Cotton Campaign issued a [Roadmap for Reforms in Uzbekistan](#), which Uzbek policy makers are referencing as they seek to combat forced labor.

Seafood Workers' Rights Campaign Builds Connections at Labor Notes Conference

The Labor Notes Asia Regional Conference co-organized by ILRF in Taipei in August brought together over 200 trade unionists and human rights defenders from across 17 countries. This presented a fantastic opportunity for ILRF's Seafood Workers' Rights Campaign, which is currently expanding from Thailand to other countries in Asia, to bring together labor leaders and rank-and-file organizers who are making important strides in organizing workers in the global seafood industry in their countries. We planned a panel and strategy workshop on "Organizing Migrant Workers in the Seafood Industry" with speakers from the Migrant Workers Rights Network in Thailand, the Yilan Migrant



Fishermen’s Union in Taiwan, the Indonesian Migrant Workers’ Union, and the Migrant Workers’ Movement Supporters’ Group in South Korea. Panelists and participants discussed trends in labor rights abuse of migrant seafood and fishing workers across the four countries. They also identified successful strategies used to win legal battles on the right to organize for migrant workers as well as strategies for collective bargaining.

Marching in Thailand on World Day for Decent Work

On October 7, World Day for Decent Work, ILRF’s Senior Seafood Campaign Coordinator Kimberly Rogovin joined a march and rally with thousands of trade unionists, migrant workers, and labor activists in Bangkok, Thailand. Organized by the State Enterprise Workers’ Relations Confederation – the largest trade union federation in the country representing 44 trade unions with a total of 200,000 members – and the Thai Labour Solidarity Committee, the main demands to the Thai government were: (1) Ratify ILO Conventions 87 and 98 on freedom of association and collective bargaining; (2) End privatization of public services, nationalized industries, and other forms of privatization; and (3) Raise the minimum wage. These Thai labor organizations have been campaigning for international labor rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining for all workers for decades, including advocating on behalf of the estimated four million Southeast Asian migrant workers in Thailand who face restrictions on the right to organize.



Clean Clothes Campaign Examines Deadly History of Social Compliance Initiatives

A new report from our partner the Clean Clothes Campaign shows how the multi-billion dollar social auditing industry operates as a corporate social responsibility (CSR) tool to protect brand reputation and profits, while aggravating risks to garment workers. [Fig Leaf for Fashion](#) connects the dots between the most well known business-driven social compliance initiatives, such as Social Accountability International, WRAP, the FLA, and amfori BSCI, and the largest corporate-controlled auditing firms, including Bureau Veritas, TÜV Rheinland, UL, RINA, and ELEVATE, as well as the brand interests that they serve. The report offers glaring examples of corporate negligence through case examples from the past decade and shows how the social audit industry has protected the image and reputation of brands and their business models, while standing in the way of more effective models that include mandatory transparency and binding commitments to remediation.



Evaluating the Current Context of Labor Rights Advocacy in China

The sharply altered political landscape in China over the last several years has serious implications on labor rights advocacy for the millions of migrant workers. ILRF has been looking at the [impact of repression](#) against labor activists in the aftermath of Jasic union organizing, highlighting the deepening and broadening of harassment and detention as well as the increasingly preemptive nature of the repression. More than 100 labor activists and student supporters have been arbitrarily detained over the past year. ILRF is also assessing the [prospect of labor reforms](#) in China. We find that the momentum for pro-worker legal and trade union reforms has stalled amid China's economic slowdown and the uncertainty over the US-China trade conflict. However, new organizing opportunities are opening up in China's burgeoning platform economy, where labor protection remains weak and workers are beginning to take action.



55 U.S. Representatives Call on Honduras to Halt Labor Violations

Gabby Rosazza, USLEAP Program Coordinator, led the effort that got 55 Members of Congress to deliver a [letter to the U.S. Department of Labor and U.S. Trade Representative](#) about the failure of the CAFTA – Central America Free Trade Agreement – complaint in Honduras. The Members expressed their deep concern about how the Honduran government has failed to put a stop to rampant labor violations committed by transnational corporations and instead aligned with employers in their efforts to bust workers' efforts to form unions. The letter cited two cases in the melon and palm oil sector and stated, "If the Government of Honduras is allowed to undermine STAS and its members' rights, it will only further entrench corporate impunity and weaken rule of law, one of the many factors that contributes to the cycle of poverty and pushes people to migrate." For further information, see the press release from Representatives Jan Schakowsky, Raul M. Grijalva, and Andy Levin.



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