

International Cocoa Initiative

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STATEMENT FOR GENERAL RELEASE

ICI applauds the protocol process, urges continued progress.

June 7th 2005

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As a July 1st protocol deadline approaches, the executive director of the International Cocoa Initiative (ICI) Peter McAllister says the protocol has made a significant impact. “Key producing governments are fully engaged and industry is committing time and resources to combating child and forced labor”. McAllister says “industry needs to maintain this active and engaged approach as well as its long-term commitment to a cocoa supply-chain free of child and forced labor.”

The five-step protocol, signed in Washington in September 2001, by politicians, the Ivorian ambassador to the US, representatives from the cocoa industry, the ILO and witnessed by labour union representatives and social activists included a commitment to establish a joint international foundation. This foundation, the ICI, was set up in 2002 “to oversee and sustain efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labour in the growing and processing of cocoa beans and their derivative products”.

The ICI, McAllister emphasises, is not an industry player but an independent voice dedicated to eradicating child and forced labor in cocoa production worldwide. As a registered charity, its Board of Directors represents a wide range of stakeholders: human rights and child labor organizations, trades unions, representatives from local groups in the cocoa growing countries, as well as cocoa using businesses. The ICI carries out on-the-ground work in cocoa growing regions.

The fifth key step laid out in the protocol is the implementation, by July 1st 2005 of “industry-wide standards of public certification” that cocoa beans be grown and/or processed without any of the worst forms of child labor.

“The protocol process is working,” McAllister says. “It may not be going as fast as we’d like, and it hasn’t gone as far as it needs to go, but, in the two largest cocoa-producing countries, the Ivory Coast and Ghana, we have seen a real change in government attitudes to child labour in the sector”.

“We are seeing concrete changes in laws and policies. National action plans are being implemented, and ILO conventions have been ratified. There are programmes now on the ground that didn’t exist when the protocol was signed. The level of impetus has increased because the protocol exists.”

McAllister says there is also a spill-over effect in other producing countries. “Governments are aware of what’s going on, and aware that they will need to make changes as well.”

He says industry has remained engaged as a sector, and is now a powerful voice in the efforts to address child labour. “When governments know that all their key customers have decided that child labour is unacceptable, it makes a big difference.”

“The ICI’s approach is to develop the conditions for real change on the ground and demonstrate an approach at community level that will work in the long term and be replicated. The smallholder farm is where the decisions are being made about how and when to use child workers, although these decisions are influenced by a number of factors. ICI is also working with local organizations to make sure there is a safety net for those children who have been found and who need protection. We have programmes on the ground in Ghana, and as well in the Ivory Coast, where there have been particular challenges due to the civil crisis.

“We haven’t yet solved the problem of child and forced labour in the sector, but we are building the partnerships and implementing programmes for solid, sustainable change in the future.”