

**Public Hearing to Collect Information to  
Assist in the Development of the List of Goods from  
Countries Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor**

**Wednesday, May 28, 2008**

**Questions for Thea Lee, Policy Director  
AFL-CIO  
Follow-up: June 13, 2008**

**Mexico**

1. It would be useful to have more evidence that supports your statements about children's work in the production of tomatoes, eggplant, sweet bell peppers, corn and tobacco. Can you give us an idea of the basis of your statements – what methodologies were used to gather the information? Was this field research by AFL-CIO or another organization?

*For each product can you tell us?*

- How widespread is the use of child labor in the production of each crop? Would you characterize the use of child labor in the production of each of these crops as “more than an isolated incident”?
- Do you have information of the proportion of the labor force in each of these crops is made up of children?
- Do you have information of the tasks children are performing in the planting and/or harvesting of the crop, and whether or not these activities are hazardous?
- Do you have any evidence that children are forced to work in the cultivation of these crops, by employers or agents other than their parents?

The information provided in my testimony came from the following sources, as listed in the bibliography:

- **According to the National Institute of Geography and Statistics (INEGI) in 2004, there are approximately 3.3 million working children under 14 in Mexico, of whom one third are under 12.<sup>1</sup> Of these, about half work in agriculture.<sup>2</sup>**
- “Incorporación prematura al mercado laboral. Trabajo de menores en la industria, trayectoria escolar y capacitación,” cited in Mercedes Gema López Limón, “La Fuerza de Trabajo Infantil en México,” 2006, [www.uam.mx/cdi/childwatch2006/pdf/lopezlimon\\_mx.pdf](http://www.uam.mx/cdi/childwatch2006/pdf/lopezlimon_mx.pdf)

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<sup>1</sup> Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadísticas [INEGI], *El Trabajo Infantil en México*, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Id., p. 50.

- “Cosecha de dolor y esperanza,” *Excelsior*, 14 October 2007.
- Sagrario Tapia and Ramón García, “Obliga a niños la necesidad,” *El Imparcial*, 30 January 2006.
- J. Gamlin, P. Diaz Romo and T. Hesketh “Exposure of young children working on Mexican tobacco plantations to organophosphorous and carbamic pesticides, indicated by cholinesterase depression,” *Child care, health and development*, 33, 3, 246–248 (2007)

Currently, we have no other information beyond the citations listed here. However, we believe that the evidence provided in these sources merits further investigation from the Department of Labor into the significance of the problem of child labor in export agriculture in Mexico.

### **Nicaragua, Guatemala India and Malawi**

2. As for Nicaragua and Guatemala, in your written statement, you concur with other organizations’ findings of child labor and/or bonded labor in sugarcane cultivation and sugar refining. For India you mentioned bonded child labor in cottonseed production and granite mining. And in Malawi you mentioned tobacco cultivation. Do you know whether, in each case, there were findings of child labor, forced labor, or both?
3. For each country, can you tell us how widespread is the use of child labor and/or forced labor in the production of each commodity? Would you characterize the use of child labor and/or forced labor as “more than an isolated incident”?
4. Do you have a sense of the tasks children are performing, and whether or not they are hazardous?

Please see: International Labor Rights Forum, “Response to FR Doc E7-25036 Filed 12-26-2007, Re: Request for Information for the Development and Maintenance of the List of Goods from Countries Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor. Federal Register Notice Vol. 72, No. 247, Pg. 73374,” submitted March 26, 2008. We currently do not have additional information beyond what is in the ILRF comments. We mentioned them, however, to show that there are a number of organizations that agree with ILRF’s findings.

### **Vietnam, Indonesia, Ecuador, and China**

5. Your testimony stated that forced labor and child labor occur in the shrimp industry in Vietnam, Indonesia, and China.
  - What methodologies were used to gather the information upon which this statement is based? Was this field research by AFL-CIO or another organization?
  - Could you verify whether these labor practices are used in the production of shrimp alone, or additional, specific types of seafood?

6. How widespread is the use of child labor and forced labor in the production of shrimp in these three countries? Would you characterize the use of child labor or forced labor as “more than an isolated incident” in this industry in each of these countries?
7. Do you have a sense of the tasks children are performing in shrimp processing, and whether or not these activities are hazardous?
8. Do you have any evidence that children are forced to work in this industry, by employers or agents other than their parents?

There has not been to our knowledge significant research done examining the use of forced labor and child labor in the shrimp industries in these countries. We know that these four countries are major shrimp exporters to the U.S. Based on our understanding of labor conditions and worker rights in these countries, as well as anecdotal evidence, we think that there should be an investigation and more research done about the conditions for workers in the shrimp industry in Vietnam, Indonesia, Ecuador, and China.

### **Bangladesh and Thailand**

Please note that the Solidarity Center has taken necessary steps to protect the anonymity of its sources, for their own protection.

9. Much of the information in your testimony about the shrimp processing industry in Bangladesh and Thailand was based on the Solidarity Center’s report, “The True Cost of Shrimp.” The report is based on interviews conducted at 15 shrimp processing plants in Thailand and 10 plants in Bangladesh, but we would like to get more information about the sample size. Approximately how many workers were interviewed per factory, and/or how many in all for this report?

A Solidarity Center partner organization conducted the research in Thailand. In one set of interviews, the researchers interviewed 193 people from 50 factories - producing both shrimp and other forms of seafood. The 15 factories identified as using child labor were taken from this set of interviews. In another set of interviews, five workers from three factories (all shrimp processing) were interviewed.

In Bangladesh, interviewers from a partner organization spoke with 34 workers from nine factories in one set of interviews and 10 workers from 8 factories in another. Additionally, 6 children, ages 8-13, from two factories were also interviewed.

Some interviews were conducted by a USAID contracted researcher. An excerpt from these interviews can be found on pg. 29 and footnote #67 of the report.

Based on information gathered in the initial interviews, and other sources, 20 factories were found to be using child labor (meaning children under the age of 14 in Bangladesh). Information on the 20 factories was taken from eyewitness accounts given to the Solidarity Center by a partner organization.

10. The report indicates that “in addition to industry research, Solidarity Center partners interviewed workers ...” Please clarify what this industry research consisted of?

Mainly tracking of global supply chains using the Port Import Export Reporting Service (PIERS) database. Please see pg. 4 of the report.

11. Did this research give you a sense of how widespread is the problems of child labor and forced labor in the production of shrimp in Thailand and Bangladesh?

- What were the hazardous work activities undertaken by children 17 and under?

In Thailand, research on the extent of child labor was conducted by Solidarity Center partner organizations and is referenced on pg. 18 of the report. Researchers from the ILO and Thailand’s Mahidol University claimed in 2006 that 19 percent of workers in seafood processing plants were under 15 and 22 percent between 15 and 17.

Another report estimated that 20,000 children (under 18) are working in the province of Samut Sakhon and lists some of the activities, including “peeling shrimp, transferring heavy loads, and drying, boiling, and shelling various types of seafood.” (See footnote in report.). Solidarity Center researchers also noted children peeling shrimp and doing custodial work such as sweeping and moving heavy loads to and from trucks.

Researchers in Bangladesh particularly noted the use of children to move finished products from the processing floor onto trucks. This work involves a certain amount of pushing, packing, and heavy lifting.

- If forced labor is widespread, is it forced labor of children?

Children cannot adequately give consent to labor (under the definition of child labor). As such, we consider all child labor forced labor.

12. In relation to Thailand, the report mentions child labor and forced labor in “seafood processing plants” and those children are working in “fisheries-related jobs” including shrimp. Can you tell us what other kinds of seafood are involved? Is more specific information available on child labor and/or forced labor in the production of these other types of seafood? Is it possible to disaggregate shrimp from the data on “seafood processing” in the report?

The processing plants of Thailand’s Samut Sakhon District handle a range of seafood products, including tuna, surimi, seafood-based cat food and similar products. Thailand is among the world’s leading exporters of canned tuna fish, so many processing plants handle that product. Usually, shrimp and other seafood products are handled in separate facilities.

Though the Solidarity Center separated out shrimp data from that of other types of seafood processing, the complaints voiced by workers were similar.

13. Your testimony referenced a recent UN-sponsored report on the role of labor brokers. Does this refer to labor brokers in general or labor brokers used specifically in the

shrimp industry? Is labor brokering widespread in the industry? If so, what relation does it have to forced and/or child labor?

Labor brokering is a major issue for all seafood processing jobs in Samut Sakhon. An estimated 70-80 percent of workers in Samut Sakhon are migrants who are drawn to the area by the demand for labor-intensive work. Rather than “widespread,” the term the UN chooses to use is “systematic,” meaning that labor brokering involves an intricate web of brokers, employers, and local officials.

Pages 20-22 of the report describe the relationship of labor brokers to issues of debt bondage and forced labor and some of the tactics used to exploit vulnerable workers.

14. You mentioned the use of debt bondage. Does this reference refer to migrant workers in general or migrant workers working in the shrimp industry? Are children in debt bondage?

In the report, the reference is specifically to migrant workers in the shrimp and seafood processing in Samut Sakhon, Thailand.

It's unclear whether children specifically are held in situations of debt bondage or are perhaps working to pay their parents' debt, or simply working to supplement family earnings.