

CHRISTMAS, CHILD LABOR, & CHOCOLATE

By Marie Ciccone

In a few weeks we will be celebrating the feast of the birth of Jesus Christ. Many parts of the world and especially children look forward to this wonderful and blessed event.

Now try to imagine that a child in your own family could be forced into child labor under terrible working conditions day after day without any hope for the future. It sounds like a nightmare but unfortunately for many families in certain countries of West Africa, this is really a nightmare coming true especially when it comes to cocoa.



The beginning of the finished product of chocolate begins with the picking of the cocoa bean and unfortunately it is often where child labor becomes a part of the chain. As of 2015, up to 19,000 children were working in the Ivory Coast, the world's largest producer of cocoa and many of these children may have been victims of trafficking or slavery. It is estimated that more than 1.8 million children in West Africa are involved in growing cocoa. These children, ages 5 years to 11 years old worked in agriculture in cocoa growing areas and many of them are engaged in hazardous work including working with sharp tools, agricultural chemicals and carrying heavy loads.



One of the best options for the purchase of chocolate is called Fair Trade (a label that assures that the product being purchased has met certain criteria in its line of production). In reality we need to pay more for chocolate than we do now if we are serious about ending poverty and exploitation.

Another option is to contact retail stores, manufacturers and importers to find out the origin of the product (chocolate) and let them know you will not purchase chocolate that involves child labor anywhere in the food chain from cocoa bean picking to points further along in its production.

DANGERS OF CHILD LABOR IN COCOA

2 million children are engaged in hazardous work on cocoa farms in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. More than half report being injured by their work. Dangerous conditions on these farms that may impact children's health, access to education and future livelihoods include:



**Spraying
pesticides**



**Lifting
heavy loads**



**Burning
fields**



**Using sharp
tools**