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Taking Slave Labor Out of American Markets

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This December marks the 150th anniversary of passage of the 13th amendment, banning slavery in the United States. Its passage was a historic step towards eradicating forced labor on our shores and a reaffirmation of the aspirational values of the Constitution.

Sadly, 150 years hasn't proved to be enough time to eliminate the scourge of human trafficking. Slavery is now illegal in every nation, yet behind the scenes human traffickers are thriving, pulling in massive profits totaling \$150 billion per year. For the sake of the more than 20 million victims of trafficking worldwide, we must make sure that slavery is not only illegal, but eliminated. Traffickers should be behind bars, not lining their pockets through exploitation.

As part of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2005, the Department of Labor (DOL) submitted its annual report disclosing products the DOL believes are produced by child or forced labor. The *List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor* offers an extensive accounting of what illicitly produced goods may make their way into American stores or American business supply chains. While it's illegal to import goods produced with forced labor, as [NBC News recently reported](#), a loophole has allowed them to slip through for over 80 years

It's called the "consumptive demand" clause, introduced as part of the Tariff Act of 1930, which forbids importing products made through forced labor. The loophole allows U.S. companies to import goods made with forced labor when similar goods made in the United States can't satisfy consumer demand. Over the years, courts interpreted this broadly, leading to more goods created through forced labor crossing into our domestic markets.

So which slave-made goods are in your local department stores?

According to the DOL's list of goods produced through child and forced labor, products including cotton, garments, palm oil, cocoa, coffee, and electronics are the most ubiquitous. U.S. consumers would be hard-pressed to identify anything they have purchased in the past year that hasn't included at least one of those components.

Worse yet, countries that received [controversial rankings](#) in this year's Trafficking in Person Report are major producers of some of these goods. [Malaysia](#), for example, has a pervasive labor trafficking problem in its palm oil and electronics industries. We lose our bargaining chip to help countries like Malaysia improve their records on forced labor when we upgrade them

prematurely for political reasons and continue freely importing these tainted goods. Closing the consumptive demand loophole will go a long way towards ensuring that those who profit off of forced and child labor don't have free access to American markets.

The DOL highlighted another surprising item in their report: Christmas decorations. What better way to honor the spirit of the season than by making sure our Christmas trees aren't decorated through child labor?