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The list of slave-labor imports you use might surprise you

New provisions of a law signed by President Barack Obama allow feds to enforce a ban on importing goods made by children or slave laborers

Lawmakers say the law closes “an unconscionable and archaic loophole” that forced America to accept such products

Do you know where your food and shoes came from?



An Indian child laborer eats a piece of a muskmelon on the World Day against Child Labor on the outskirts of Jammu, India. Despite the country’s rapid economic growth, child labor remains widespread in India, where an estimated 13 million children work, with laws meant to keep kids in school and out of the workplace routinely flouted. AP FILE PHOTO

BY LISA GUTIERREZ

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That new soccer ball you just bought your child? If it came from China, it could have been made by workers who work up to 21 hours a day.

That trendy mineral makeup on your face? A child in India could have spent long, hot days mining the sparkly mica in it.

Your smartphone? “The likelihood that one of those was not touched by a slave is pretty low,” said one U.S. State Department official.

If you’ve never thought about the slave labor that could have been used to make those cool shoes on your feet, [click on SlaveryFootprint.org](#). The website is run by a nonprofit working to rid the world of slave labor and human trafficking.

By answering just a few questions, the website will tell you “how many slaves work for you.”

Child laborers around the world make bricks, farm, weave rugs, dive for fish, work as prostitutes and soldiers, and dismantle toxic electronics.

It’s estimated that about 27 million people work under slavery conditions around the world, many with a direct connection to something you own or use right now.

President Barack Obama made a move last week to stop that. New provisions of a law he signed will let U.S. officials enforce an 86-year-old ban on importing goods made by children or slaves.

The [law closes what one lawmaker called “an unconscionable and archaic loophole”](#) that forced America to accept products made under those conditions.

The Tariff Act of 1930, which gave Customs and Border Protection the authority to seize shipments where forced labor was suspected and block further imports, was last used in 2000.

It had been used fewer than 40 times largely because of two words: “consumptive demand.” That meant that if there wasn’t enough supply to meet American demand, imports were allowed into the country regardless of how they were produced.

The Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act Obama signed eliminates that language and allows stiffer enforcement by federal agents.

Human rights activists hope Obama’s move will push customs officials to be aggressive in seizing shipments of goods connected to forced labor.

<http://www.newsobserver.com/news/nation-world/world/article63808092.html>

“If the U.S. government works to really keep out goods made with forced labor, this change will have a profound ripple effect on supply chains worldwide,” said David Abramowitz, an advocate for the change and vice president of Humanity United.

For consumers, it’s often impossible to know whether their products have been made by slave hands. [According to Human Rights Watch](#), the United States is the No. 1 destination for “Made in Cambodia” clothing — garments stitched in sweatshops by mostly women, but also children who work into the night.

Big brands like the Gap, H&M and Adidas have been known to use such factories. And about that makeup.

When human rights expert Gulnara Shahinian advised the United Nations three years ago on World Day Against Child Labor, she said “[one of the most abhorrent forms of child slavery](#) is found in mining and quarrying, where children start work from the age of three.

“During my country visits, I have seen how unscrupulous employers take advantage of children’s small physique for artisanal mining which results in their stunted growth,” Shahinian said.

“In artisanal mining, both boys and girls handle highly toxic chemicals to extract minerals exposing them to irreversible health damages.”

And what about that peel-and-eat shrimp you just tossed into your salad?

An Associated Press investigation last year found that [Thai seafood shipped to the United States was caught and processed by trapped and enslaved workers](#). Bonded labor is used for most of Southeast Asia’s shrimping industry, which sends more shrimp to the United States than any other country.

The revelation led to the release of more than 2,000 enslaved fishermen and arrests of suspected traffickers. But when The Associated Press followed up on its report it found that the abuses were still rampant — and that the United States had done a poor job of keeping shrimp peeled by slaves out of the country.

[A Labor Department list of more than 350 goods](#) produced by child labor or forced labor provides a detailed breakdown that human rights groups plan to use

as they push the government to take action. The list is long, and eye-opening. A sample:

- From Mexico: Chile peppers, cucumbers, eggplant and tomatoes.
- From Burma: Sunflowers.
- From Cambodia: Textiles.
- From China: Christmas decorations, fireworks and footwear.
- From India: Brassware, carpets, soccer balls and leather goods.
- From Malaysia: Electronics.
- From Turkey: Furniture.

Business organizations, particularly in the [confectionary industry](#), were the biggest opponents of killing the loophole in the trade law, [according to Quartz](#).

A McClatchy investigation in 2001 revealed that 43 percent of the world's cocoa beans — the raw material in chocolate — was [harvested by young boys sold or tricked into slavery](#) on small farms in West Africa.

A spokesman for the National Confectioners Association told Quartz that it had not and doesn't use the tariff loophole to bring slave-tainted cocoa into the United States.

HOW TO HELP

On World Day Against Child Labor every June, consumers are offered tips on how they can help end the problem. A few suggestions:

- Ask politely about the origins of the products sold at places where you shop.
- Look for certified fair trade labels — Fair Trade Certified, the Fairtrade Mark, and the Goodweave label — to make sure you're buying products that didn't involve child labor.
- Grow more of your own food, frequent U-pick farms and shop at farmers markets with verified labor practices.

