

Foreword

When the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) began researching international child labor 25 years ago, information moved slowly. Policy analysts placed phone calls to overseas organizations and waited for faxes from foreign governments. This was all to shed more light on a problem that mostly existed in the dark, and global estimates on the magnitude of child labor did not yet exist. The result was the first ILAB child labor report, *By the Sweat & Toil of Children*, which was mailed to hundreds of locations across the globe.

Today, information moves faster, and the knowledge base is broader. *Sweat & Toil* is now an app, available on iTunes and Google Play, that aggregates over 1,000 pages of child labor and forced labor research.

This is an "Age of Acceleration." Technology is changing the way we live and work, and inventors and companies are spearheading innovation to improve our lives. Yet, a relic of the previous era persists: 152 million child laborers and 25 million forced laborers are estimated to still sweat and toil worldwide. These adults and children work in hazardous, abusive, or even slave-like conditions. And U.S. workers have been left to compete on an uneven playing field.



R. Alexander Acosta, U.S. Secretary of Labor

The United States should not have to compete with other countries that fail to play by the rules, and seek an unfair advantage by turning a blind eye to labor abuses. Trade between nations should be fair, and profits should not come from the backs of children or slaves. The cost of child labor and forced labor is simply too high for all involved.

I am proud to release the 17th edition of the annual Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, and the 8th edition of the List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor—the flagship reports in the series we began publishing 25 years ago. The research in these reports helps shine a light on these conditions overseas, and offers concrete actions U.S. trading partners can take to accelerate efforts to eliminate child labor and forced labor. While there has been significant progress over the last two decades, including 94 million fewer child laborers estimated today than there were in 2000, these reports show us that we need to accelerate progress toward ending child labor, forced labor, human trafficking, and modern slavery. This is vital if we are to make trade fair for all.

American workers cannot compete with producers abroad who use child labor or forced labor, provide unsafe working conditions, or do not pay workers what they are legally owed. These reprehensible practices undercut the higher standards we maintain to protect the well-being of our workforce here at home.

Accelerating progress means intensifying efforts on what we are already doing and what we know works. That means enforcing trade commitments, strengthening labor standards, and removing children from dangerous or demeaning work that robs them of their childhoods. This means prosecuting and holding accountable those individuals who force children to traffic drugs, wage battle as part of armed groups, or perform sex acts. It means permanently shuttering dishonest recruitment agencies and illicit companies that lure workers with false promises of decent work into abhorrent conditions of forced labor. And as we intensify our efforts, we must also seek innovations and creative solutions to more effectively address these challenges.

At the U.S. Department of Labor and across federal agencies, we are doing our part to accelerate progress on these issues. Here at home, our Wage and Hour Division investigated 750 cases with child labor violations last year, and debarred employers from applying for certification to request temporary foreign workers due to frequent abuse of workers in the H-2A agricultural worker visa program. Our Occupational Safety and Health inspectors have also assessed thousands of dollars in civil penalties for failing to protect employees from falls and other safety hazards. We must also seek innovations and creative solutions to more effectively address these challenges. Businesses can also accelerate progress by using our data and consulting our Comply Chain app, now available in Spanish and French, to be vigilant and dig deeper in their supply chains to ensure that child labor and forced labor are not in the mix of goods or services they offer.

In May of 2018, the Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection (CBP) used ILAB's extensive research documenting the use of forced labor in the production of cotton from Turkmenistan in making the historic decision to block all goods made with Turkmen cotton from entering the United States. The message here is clear: If you are a trading partner that does not abide by and uphold your commitments to end child labor or forced labor, the U.S. will do what it takes to protect vulnerable workers from exploitation, safeguard American jobs, and create a fair playing field for countries that play by the rules.

Like the rest of the international community, as communicated in the G20 Labor and Employment Ministers' Hamburg Declaration, the United States acknowledges that meeting the ambitious goal of ending child labor, forced labor, human trafficking, and all forms of modern slavery requires that we accelerate the very real progress that has been made over the past quarter-century. In this Age of Acceleration, we must keep pace by forging new partnerships, introducing innovations, and accelerating actions that take us closer to a world free of child labor and forced labor.

It is my hope that these reports will provide you with a renewed sense of urgency to continue this fight and bring others along who will join us in the race toward fair global trade—one that gives children their childhoods, forced laborers their freedom, and U.S. workers a fair playing field.

R. ALEXANDER ACOSTA
Secretary of Labor
September 2018

When Secretary of Labor Alexander Acosta named me to be Deputy Undersecretary for International Affairs in September 2017, it was my great honor to return to a bureau I had departed over 10 years earlier, but whose mission had never left me. My return marked the 70th anniversary of the Bureau of International Labor Affairs, or ILAB, as we call it. While our work, like the world, may look very different today than it did in 1947 or even in 2006, it still serves the same vital purpose: to help ensure a fair playing field for U.S. workers and businesses by improving labor standards overseas.

“The Age of Acceleration” Secretary Acosta mentioned has resulted in the swift rise of international trade and increasingly complex global supply chains. Yet we must ensure that as we accelerate, we also leave behind backward practices like child labor and forced labor.

Whether these abusive labor practices are checked or unchecked, the existence of child labor and forced labor run counter to our values as a nation. We want the goods we consume to be made by workers free from exploitation, not made by children or slaves. We also want workers in the U.S. to be able to compete on a fair global playing field.



Martha E. Newton, Deputy Undersecretary for International Affairs

That is why Secretary Acosta is committed to seeing accelerated action among our trade partners, including stronger enforcement against labor violations and demonstrated action to protect workers and children, especially those most vulnerable to exploitation. I am particularly proud that creating the knowledge base for such accelerated action is one of ILAB’s key contributions to the global effort to protect workers around the world.

Over the past 25 years, ILAB’s Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking has been providing groundbreaking and influential research that equips governments, workers, businesses, and civil society with the information they need to take effective action against labor exploitation.

And we’re not resting on our laurels. The country assessments in this year’s Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor report, mandated by the Trade and Development Act of 2000, are based on the most stringent criteria ever. In order to earn a “Significant Advancement” assessment, a country must establish a basic floor of labor protections. This year, there were 14 countries that achieved this distinction, including Colombia, Paraguay, and India.

Of the approximately 1,700 country-specific suggested actions in this report, 1,100 of them are directed at improving laws and strengthening enforcement, providing a roadmap for over 140 governments to follow to accelerate progress in eliminating child labor in their own countries.

These are concrete actions governments can take to accelerate change and improve lives. The Government of Uzbekistan's work with the international community to significantly reduce the forced mobilization of children in the cotton fields is one example of how such change can and does happen. We commend this effort and appeal to the government to build on it by extending protections to adults who are forced to work under the threat of retaliation.

Our List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor, mandated by the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2005, also provides vital information for both governments and businesses to accelerate change in improving the lives of workers abroad and creating a level playing field. The 2018 edition covers 148 goods in 76 countries. This includes the addition of 10 new goods, including some goods that consumers in the United States use every day, such as peppers from Mexico and mica from India.

By pinpointing specific industries where child labor and forced labor are occurring, the report equips governments and companies with information to help them target appropriate policy responses or direct resources as part of due-diligence or risk-management

systems. While there are new goods from the governments of Brazil, El Salvador, and Paraguay, it is because they have proactively invested resources and collected and used their own data to determine where they can be most effective in addressing labor abuses in their own countries. Their commitment to data-driven policy-making serves as an example to other countries working to end child labor and forced labor, and these governments should be commended for these efforts.

Consumers, too, are growing more savvy and selective in their purchases—demanding not only quality products but responsible production practices—and social entrepreneurs are channeling the report's data into point-of-sale tools to inform purchases. ILAB welcomes this virtuous cycle of consumer advocacy and business response to consumer demand, as it gets more people involved, who can be a part of the solution.

Twenty years ago, 7 million people marched across 5 continents in the Global March Against Child Labor. The spirit of that march continues today, and must energize our collective commitment to march on behalf of the 152 million children still in child labor and 25 million adults and children in forced labor. As we seek inspiration from the past, let us recommit ourselves and show a renewed sense of purpose to accelerate progress toward the goal of eliminating child labor and forced labor.

MARTHA E. NEWTON
Deputy Undersecretary for International Affairs
September 2018