24 March 2010

Response to Panorama " Chocolate The Bitter Truth"

The Global Chocolate and Cocoa Industry condemns the Worst Forms of Child Labour in the cocoa supply chain.

Unacceptable labour practices on cocoa farms in the Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana are a recognised issue, with too many children participating in hazardous farming tasks or working at the expense of attending school. We believe that no child should ever be harmed in the process of growing or harvesting cocoa.

In West Africa, 90% of cocoa is grown on small family farms. In Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana there are over 1.5 million cocoa farming families living in some of the most remote parts of these countries who depend on cocoa for their livelihood. It is incumbent on us not to put at risk the economic welfare of these decent and hard working cocoa farming families.

The vast majority of cocoa farms are not owned by the companies that make chocolate or supply cocoa and we therefore don't have control over cocoa farming and labour practices.

For nearly ten years now, the global chocolate and cocoa industry have made extraordinary efforts, along with the Governments of Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana, Non-governmental organisations and a host of other international organisations including the International Cocoa Initiative (ICI) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), to bring about positive and sustainable change to the way cocoa is grown and harvested in West Africa.

In 2001, Industry representatives of the chocolate and cocoa industry signed an agreement, today known as the Harkin-Engel Protocol, developed in partnership with U.S. Senator Tom Harkin and U.S. Representative Eliot Engel. The agreement laid out a series of steps aimed at eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labour in growing cocoa and their derivative products. Since its signing, the Protocol has been a positive and important catalyst for change in labour practices in cocoa farming, driving a number of important achievements.

A primary element of the Protocol required that industry, in partnership with the governments of Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana and other stakeholders develop and implement sector-wide public Certification process across the cocoa growing region in these countries.

A public Certification process is underway across the cocoa farming sector in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana reporting on the incidence of the Worst Forms of Child Labour and on progress in reducing incidence. Public Certification includes several key elements:

- Data collection to generate detailed, accurate information on cocoa farming labour practices on a sector wide basis
- Public reporting of the data by the Governments of Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana
- Remediation activities to address the issues identified in the data collection process
- Independent verification to ensure integrity of the public Certification process

The chocolate and cocoa sector is commited to a programme of investment and improvement of social conditions in cocoa producing countries. Collectively the global chocolate and cocoa industry has spent more than 75 million US Dollars over the past decade in support of cocoa farming families and communities and we are currently supporting some 40 social and economic programmes in West Africa that improve the lives cocoa farmers in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana.

A second key requirement of the Protocol was the establishment of an independent foundation, a partnership between civil society and industry, uniquely working to combat worst forms of child labour and forced adult labour in the cocoa farming communities of Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana.

ICI was established in 2002 and has established a significant programme of community based activities working in communities in Ghana and in Cote d'Ivoire and bringing about real and lasting change.

Our firm belief is that no child should ever be harmed in the farming of cocoa. In addition to industry programmes, we remain committed to support government and our global partners in the pursuit of sustainable cocoa farming, helping farmers, families and children achieve a better life.

Further Information:
www.cocoafarming.org.uk