

The Hon. Kevin Rudd MP
Prime Minister
PO Box 476
Morningside Qld 4170

Dear Prime Minister,

I have recently been horrified to learn that the chocolate commonly sold in stores across Australia is made from cocoa grown using child exploitation and slavery.

Approximately 70% of the cocoa beans used to make the world's chocolate comes from West Africa, mainly the Ivory Coast and Ghana. Child trafficking and exploitation is common in this region. It is estimated that in the Ivory Coast's cocoa industry alone, more than 100,000 children work under "the worst forms of child labour," and that about 10,000 are slaves. They receive little or no pay and there is no hope of ever going to school. Some media reports have claimed that in the worst cases children as young as six are being forced to work 80-100 hours a week, enduring beatings and malnutrition on top of back-breaking work.

As the Ivory Coast produces 43% of the world's cocoa, it is likely that almost half of the chocolate products sold in Australia are linked to child slavery. In the last financial year, Victorian chocolate manufacturers alone imported 3 million kilograms of Ivory Coast cocoa paste.

As a chocolate consumer I am utterly appalled at this situation. I will be taking personal action by purchasing more Fair Trade chocolate in the future. Fair Trade is ethically certified, supports local farmers in impoverished regions and invests in the development of their communities.

I would also like to encourage you to support and enact the simple yet clever idea promoted by Christopher Pyne, the federal Liberal member for the South Australian seat of Sturt and shadow minister for education, apprenticeships and training.

That is, to use the buying power of government departments to stock only Fair Trade certified chocolate in their offices. This would affect tens of thousands of vending machines, snack bars and cafes across a gamut of schools, hospitals, departmental buildings and enterprises. Though this seems a small act, it would create a profound impact. It would raise awareness about the campaign, and would send a message to manufacturers who purchase cocoa beans that they must work harder to reduce the use of child slavery in production. Raising awareness of the issue will lead to changes in consumer behaviour, which will make manufacturers take notice. It is also a practical policy decision that your government can achieve very easily and quickly.

For more information you could contact Oxfam, World Vision, Stop The Traffik or The Australian Fair Trade Association which, among other prominent organisations and persons, are all campaigning to overcome this abhorrent situation.

I strongly urge you to enact this proposal, as conscience demands that we do all we can to prevent the terrible suffering these children are enduring. I am sure that you would like to enjoy your chocolate guilt-free, and would like to help all Australians do so as well.

Yours faithfully,