

# fact sheet

today's fight for tomorrow's freedom

## Slavery and what we buy

### What is slavery?

Many people involved in the production of goods are paid very little, and some are exploited but this differs from slavery. Slaves are characterised by one or more of the following:

- Forced to work, through mental or physical threat
- Controlled by an 'employer', under the threat of some form of punishment
- Dehumanised, treated as a commodity or bought and sold as 'property'
- Physically constrained or has restrictions placed on their freedom of movement.

### How does slavery occur in the supply chain?

There is evidence of slavery in different stages of the supply chain from the production of raw materials, for example cocoa and cotton farming, to manufacturing goods such as hand-knotted rugs and even at the final stage, when the product reaches the market.

### How does the supply chain work?

Typically the final product you purchase has passed through a long chain of producers, manufacturers, distributors and retailers who have all participated in its production, delivery and sale.

It can therefore be very difficult to track a component of an end product back to a particular producer, for example cotton in a T-shirt back to a particular cotton farm. For this



Coalition of Immokalee Workers

**Some of the products we buy today in Britain may have been produced through the use of slave labour.**

Left: A worker holds a green tomato, Florida, USA.

reason it is not always possible to certify that a product has or has not been produced using slavery.

However, the way in which companies operate can affect the likelihood of slavery being a part of the final product. If a brand gives its supplier a large order with a short turnaround time beyond the suppliers' capacity, this could increase the risk of slavery as the supplier may subcontract work to factories or workers that are not regulated by the same standards as the supplier.

Company buyers may negotiate such low prices that suppliers are forced to push down the price it pays for the materials it needs, which can have a knock-on effect on those involved in the production of raw materials, increasing the likelihood of the use of forced labour.

Companies should ensure that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is respected across its whole supply chain to ensure that it is not inadvertently supporting slavery. For example, extreme poverty can lead workers into situations in which they find themselves enslaved and the government may not be properly enforcing labour laws and inspecting workplaces.

### Ricardo's story

**Ricardo was made to live in the back of a locked removal van and forced to work on a farm picking tomatoes in Florida. He was forced into debt as his 'employer' charged punitive costs for food and rent. After more than a year he managed to escape through the ventilation hatch of the van.**

**Florida tomatoes are bought by restaurant and fast-food chains. Anti-Slavery International supported the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' campaign, which succeeded in Burger King signing an agreement with them to ensure workers' rights are respected. The agreement includes a zero-tolerance guideline for suppliers regarding certain unlawful activities such as forced labour.**

# Slavery and what we buy

## What is Anti-Slavery doing?

Anti-Slavery International urges companies to consider how adjusting their operations can prevent the use of slavery in their supply chains. We also encourage companies that work in sectors vulnerable to the use of slavery to work together and share methods that tackle slavery.

Anti-Slavery International is a member of the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) [www.ethicaltrade.org](http://www.ethicaltrade.org). The ETI is an alliance of companies, non-governmental organisations and trade union organisations. Its goal is to ensure that the working conditions of workers producing for the UK market meet or exceed international labour standards. Anti-Slavery International encourages companies to adopt and implement ETI's Base Code, a set of minimum labour standards, and engages with the business community to develop new responses to eradicate slavery. Businesses understand their supply chain and so are in a strong position to develop and implement those responses in partnership with others. Anti-Slavery International also recommends that companies involved in South Asia adopt the Ambedkar Principles, a set of guidelines that can help companies develop affirmative action plans to help tackle caste discrimination, which is deeply embedded in this region and leaves many vulnerable to slavery.

## Core labour standards

Labour standards are developed, agreed and enforced by the International Labour Organization, which is the part of the United Nations. Human rights groups such as Anti-Slavery International call on governments to apply these standards. These standards are binding on governments and seek to eliminate forced labour, child labour and discrimination in employment, while ensuring respect for the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining. Companies' codes of conduct and schemes should meet these standards.

Some of the biggest players in the global economy are Transnational Corporations (TNCs). It is vital that these companies are held to account, including for the way their workers are treated. The United Nations is considering adopting a new treaty on the responsibilities of TNCs and other businesses with regards to human rights. Although the draft treaty simply restates existing obligations in international law and does not create new legal obligations, it makes companies responsible for upholding relevant human rights standards, rather than just governments. This is important because governments do not always carry out this role, particularly in undemocratic countries.

## What can you do?

Ask questions when you shop. Does your local retailer stock fair trade products? Use your consumer power to show you care - buy fair trade marked products and Rugmark carpets, a certification scheme for rugs and carpets made without illegal child labour.

For retail chains, write a letter to the company headquarters asking what measures the company is taking to identify, prevent and end the use of forced labour and slavery in their supply chain. Ask if the company is a member of the ETI and ask the company to explain how it is involved.

In supermarkets, look out for the Fairtrade Mark. This is the best available guarantee that a product has not been produced using slave labour because goods can only be Fairtrade certified if they have complied with Fairtrade standards, which incorporate international human rights standards.

Go to our website for more information at:

[www.antislavery.org/supplychain](http://www.antislavery.org/supplychain)



## Why not boycott?

In certain situations boycotting specific goods or countries can actually make the situation worse and undermine the economy of an already poor country. A boycott could hurt those in slavery-like conditions as well as those employers who are not exploiting their workers, and worsen the poverty that is one of the root causes of the problem. Support fair and ethical trade initiatives instead and use consumer power to encourage retailers and companies to move to the Fairtrade scheme.

**NO SLAVERY  
NO EXCEPTIONS**

[www.antislavery.org/noexceptions](http://www.antislavery.org/noexceptions)

Sign our **No Slavery, No Exceptions** campaign pledge and help us to eradicate slavery once and for all.



Above: Protesters support the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' campaign, which led to Burger King signing an agreement with them to ensure workers' rights are respected.