

Nestlé Sued for Exploiting Children in Ivory Coast



Washington, January 14 (RHC)-- Three of the world's biggest food producers including Nestlé, have been indicted for using unpaid children to harvest cocoa in Ivory Coast.

The U.S. Supreme Court accused Nestlé, Archer-Daniels-Midland, and Cargill of aiding and abetting human rights violations by purchasing cocoa from Ivory Coast in full knowledge of the country's child slavery problem.

The ruling was made following three individuals' class-action lawsuit in 2005, alleging they had been trafficked from Mali as children and forced to work on cocoa beans fields without pay. According to the plaintiffs, they worked for up to 14 hours a day and suffered physical abuse such as whipping, being kept in locked rooms when not working, and being fed only scraps of food by day.

They claimed the companies offered financial and technical assistance to local farmers to guarantee cheap cocoa and benefited economically from violations of international labor conventions and law. Several business groups in the U.S. and Europe, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, have come out against the lawsuit because ending child slavery would be a threat to investment and "corporate human rights."

Nestle has long been criticized for its policies involving children, going back to the 1970s when the company reportedly contributed to the malnutrition and deaths of infants by discouraging breastfeeding.

More recently, Nestlé has been accused of unethically bottling California water during droughts, destroying rainforests and orangutans in pursuit of palm oil, and failing to keep lead out of noodles in India.

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