

Beyond Chocolate

So now that you've jumped on the Chocolate Campaign, and realized that every small choice you make can have large repercussions here's a next step you might take.

Time Magazine recently exposed the story of "Blood Cashews", harvested, cleaned, and prepared for sale by "slaves" who are in "drug treatment programs" in Vietnam. The story includes details of some companies ending their relationships with such "drug treatment" facilities, including one that had been making Columbia brand clothing.

Here are the first few paragraphs:

"First there were blood diamonds from the Congo. Then blood rubies from Burma. Could blood cashews from Vietnam be next? That's one implication of a new [Human Rights Watch \(HRW\) report](#) that claims cashew nuts and other Vietnamese exports are produced by drug addicts detained in



forced-labor camps across the country. Those who refuse to work are beaten with truncheons, given electric shocks, locked in isolation, deprived of food and water, and obliged to work even longer hours, the report says. Joseph Amon, director of the New York City-based organization's health and human-rights division, says what's happening at the centers "constitutes torture under international law."

Titled *The Rehab Archipelago*, the report could potentially embarrass foreign companies doing business in Vietnam. The country is the world's largest exporter of processed cashews and the U.S.'s top supplier of the nut. China and the European Union are also major buyers. ([See pictures of the 1979 China-Vietnam border war.](#))

Some 40,000 people are detained at the country's 123 drug-rehabilitation centers. Most must perform so-called labor therapy, which can involve sewing garments, making bricks or – most commonly – processing cashews. "If cashew importers want to ensure that their supply chains are not tainted with forced labor and abuse, they need to very closely scrutinize where they source their products," says Amon.

HRW's investigation has already compelled two companies – one Swiss, one American – to do just that. The Lausanne-based firm Vestergaard Frandsen terminated its relationship with five Vietnamese subcontractors after learning that thousands of its mosquito bed nets had been produced by drug detainees. "We take labor issues very seriously and would never condone nor accept what has happened," Vestergaard Frandsen said in a statement. "To us, even one bed net made under these conditions is one too many."

Meanwhile, Oregon's Columbia Sportswear Co. cut its ties to a Vietnamese factory after HRW alerted the firm that the factory had subcontracted work to a nearby drug-detention center without permission. "Involuntary labor of any kind violates our written contracts and policies and also our values," says Peter Bragdon, senior vice president of legal and corporate affairs at Columbia Sportswear. "We do not and will not tolerate it." ([Read why being forced into military labor can be a death sentence for convicts in Burma.](#))

Read more:

<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2092004,00.html#ixzz28r2KtwBt>.

Not only are the human rights of these victims being completely violated, but like many victims of human trafficking, their vulnerability is caused by another layer (or layers) of human rights problems. For all trafficked victims, there was a “push”, something that put them at risk for exploitation.

When people are marginalized for whatever reason, they may be easier to “disappear.” A member of the family, a friend, a neighbor, may “sell” someone who is ignored, not noticed, with limited support circles, into slavery with few people noticing the person is gone.

What next step will you take? Read the report? Plan a teach-in for your youth group?

Now that you know about chocolate, cashews, and clothing, where else might you find people being exploited, their human rights violated? When your eyes have been opened, and your heart has been softened, God will lead you to discover and respond to situations as varied as the greed, hate and sin that create them.