

Global NGO coalition launches campaign demanding Starbucks come clean on cocoa

Letter to CEO of world's largest coffee chain calls for action to ensure its chocolate products are free of environmental and human rights' abuses

cocoa | deforestation | child labor | modern slavery | Africa

Link to letter [here](#)

A global civil society coalition of Be Slavery Free, Freedom United, Green America, and Mighty Earth has launched a new campaign, including a public petition calling for Starbucks to come clean about where it sources the cocoa for its chocolate products. In a letter to Starbucks' CEO, Laxman Narasimhan, the coalition says the global coffee chain failed to provide the information to show it is adequately addressing deforestation and child labor risks in its cocoa supply chains, or to ensure a living income for cocoa farmers.

The letter follows the recent release of [Starbucks' 2022 Global Environmental and Social Impact \(GESI\) report](#), which failed to provide any detailed information about the company's cocoa purchasing or due diligence checks, leaving Starbucks' consumers in the dark about the ethical credentials of its chocolate drink and snack products. In January, following pressure from the coalition, Starbucks had made several commitments in relation to its cocoa sourcing policy, including publishing data about its cocoa sourcing in the GESI report, and a plan to give farmers a living income for growing its cocoa beans. The coalition is now pressuring the coffee giant to live up to those promises.

What is the problem?

The cocoa industry is plagued by numerous social and environmental issues, including some of the worst forms of child labor (which includes trafficked labor), rampant deforestation, overuse of pesticides, and farmer poverty. [In its GESI 2022 report](#), Starbucks says its approach to sourcing cocoa responsibly is "built on a foundation of traceability, responsible purchasing practices and a commitment to supporting resilient livelihoods for cocoa producers and their families", including

reducing and working towards eliminating the risks of child labor and cocoa-driven deforestation. But the company provides few details and appears to have very little understanding of where its cocoa comes from, or the conditions under which it was grown.

Starbucks sources cocoa from Côte d'Ivoire, where deforestation rates are stubbornly high. The West African country has lost more than 90% of its forest cover, largely due to cocoa-farming. The average cocoa farmer earns less than US\$1.20 a day leaving them well below the extreme poverty line of US\$2.15 per person per day. Starbucks' gross profit for the twelve months ending March 31, 2023, was [US\\$23.061B](#), a [6.57%](#) increase year-over-year.

A litany of failure

Despite repeated requests by Be Slavery Free, Freedom United, Green America, and Mighty Earth, Starbucks has failed to provide this vital information, or publish a living income strategy for farmers. While it has produced an action plan for improving its cocoa sustainability as part of its commitments under the [Cocoa and Forests Initiative](#), it has yet to provide any information about its progress towards these commitments. This renders Starbucks' claims about sourcing sustainable cocoa meaningless.

Dr Julian Oram, Senior Director at Mighty Earth said:

"We've been engaging with Starbucks for over a year but we're still in the dark as to how the world's largest coffee chain sources cocoa for its chocolate products, including sprinkles for cappuccinos. Considering it sells millions of cups of coffee a day, that's a lot of chocolate. Starbucks' customers deserve to have full confidence that the chocolate beverages and snacks they are buying from the company's stores are not laced with deforestation and child labor."

Joanna Ewart-James, Executive Director at Freedom United said:

"Starbucks does not have a reputation for encouraging worker empowerment, having famously failed to put in place even one collective bargaining agreement with workers, despite a strong union drive across U.S. stores. This approach to workers' rights is no different down their supply chain where, like many other companies, they are failing to ensure cocoa farmers supplying their chocolate products have enough to make ends meet. It is time we made clear that we expect Starbucks to put people above profit."

Carolyn Kitto, Co-Director at Be Slavery Free said:

“Starbucks has been lauded as one of the world’s most recognised and popular brands. Their logo features a Siren from Moby Dick (by Herman Melville). The Sirens lured sailors with their beautiful voices to be shipwrecked. Don’t be seduced into believing all is well. For the farmers of cocoa they are in the middle of a slow shipwreck; in a perfect storm of ongoing poverty, Worst Forms of Child Labor, massive deforestation, climate change and poisoning with pesticides.”

Todd Larsen, Executive Co-Director at Green America said:

“Starbucks claims that it is ‘Putting People First.’ The company is clearly not living up to that ambition in the way it treats its domestic workers or the laborers who supply it with cocoa. To protect cocoa communities Starbucks needs to pay cocoa farmers a living income, protect children from child labor, and end deforestation.”

Starbucks did participate in the [2023 Chocolate Scorecard](#) after refusing to take part the previous year, but the campaigners say that this is just the first step: the company needs to go further, faster. Other major cocoa buyers are using traceability tools to identify and publish lists of their suppliers.

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For more information or to arrange an interview please contact:

Carole Mitchell, Mighty Earth Senior
Director of Communications (UK-based)
Carole@mightyearth.org
+44 7917 105000

Syd Jones, Mighty Earth Press Secretary (US-based)
Syd@mightyearth.org
+1 561 809 5522

About Mighty Earth

[Mighty Earth](#) is a global advocacy organization working to defend a living planet. Our goal is to protect half of Earth for Nature and secure a climate that allows life to flourish. We are obsessed with impact and aspire to be the most effective environmental advocacy organization in the world. Our team has achieved transformative change by persuading leading industries to dramatically reduce deforestation and climate pollution throughout their global supply chains in palm oil, rubber, cocoa, and animal feed, while improving livelihoods for Indigenous and local communities across the world.

Carolyn Kitto, Co-Director Be Slavery Free (Australia based EST)
carolyn.kitto@beslaveryfree.com

+61 438 040 959

About Be Slavery Free

[Be Slavery Free](#) is an Australian coalition of civil society campaigning against modern slavery, human trafficking, forced and child labour. Be Slavery Free believes everyone has a role to play in ending the demand and supply of slavery. Our advocacy and resources empower others to help the world be slavery free.

Joanna Ewart-James, Executive Director, Freedom United (UTC)

media@freedomunited.org

+1 800 984 500 3725

About Freedom United

[Freedom United](#) is the world's largest community dedicated to ending human trafficking and modern slavery. The non-profit organization mobilizes a united community to create power for change by making the public key stakeholders in the ending of modern slavery by equipping millions of supporters with awareness, education and actionable ways to take action that drives change and influences businesses, governments and society to change conditions which allow modern slavery to thrive.

Max Karlin

mkarlin@hastingsgroupmedia.com

(703) 276-3255

About Green America

Green America is the leading green economy organization in the US. Founded in 1982, Green America provides the economic strategies, organizing power and practical tools for businesses and individuals to solve today's social and environmental problems. <http://www.GreenAmerica.org>