Houston Area Model United Nations
Specialized Committee

INTERPOL



Chair | Manizah Ahmad
Topic B: Addressing Child Trafficking and Forced Child Labor in the Cocoa Industry
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Atilgan Ozdil/Anadolu Ag

Chair Letter

Hello Delegates,

Welcome to HAMUN 52 (and in my opinion the coolest committee), INTERPOL! My name is Manizah Ahmad, and I am thrilled to be your chair for this year's conference!

I'm currently a sophomore pre-med student at the University of Houston majoring in Business (yes I'm somehow balancing accounting spreadsheets and organic chemistry because why not?!!). This will be my second time staffing for HAMUN and the INTERPOL committee. My journey with Model UN began in high school, and it became an activity that essentially pushed me outside of my comfort zone. Through MUN, I've learned the importance of and how much goes into understanding an issue from perspectives different from your own; a skill that has served me well beyond individual conferences.

I chose to chair INTERPOL because it provides a unique opportunity to explore international issues at the intersection of law enforcement and transnational crime. As delegates, I hope you challenge yourselves to look beyond obvious solutions and consider what can actually be implemented by governments, law enforcement agencies and international organizations.

A few words of advice: Come prepared, but be willing to think on your feet. Don't be afraid to speak up and approach delegates you disagree with, because some of the best ideas come from finding common ground. Most importantly, enjoy the conference! Whether you have been doing MUN for years or this is your first time, I hope INTERPOL gives you the opportunity to learn something new, meet great people, and leave with memories you'll want to talk about long after our time together ends. If you ever have any questions please do not hesitate to reach out!

I'm looking forward to meeting all of you and seeing what you bring to the committee. Best of luck, and I'll see you at conference!

Manizah Ahmad
Chair of INTERPOL
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Background Information

History:

The International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) was set up in order to strengthen cooperation among police forces worldwide and to fight transnational crime. Originally, the International Criminal Police Commission was founded in 1923 in Vienna, Austria as a result of talks concerning international police cooperation, criminal identification and extradition. In 1956, the organization adopted its present Constitution and transitioned to the current name. Since it is the largest international policing body, INTERPOL links law enforcement agencies in almost every country by means of secure communication, the sharing of intelligence, and coordinated operations. It helps its member states deal with offences that go beyond national frontiers, such as terrorism, cybercrime, human trafficking, financial crimes, drug trafficking, environmental crime and organized criminal networks. Even though INTERPOL has no authority to make arrests, it plays an important role in helping with international investigations, publishing wanted person notices and assisting with cross-border law enforcement activities. As transnational crime continues to develop, INTERPOL is committed to promoting international cooperation, improving public safety and helping its member states to deal with new global security threats.

Mandate: To promote the widest possible international police cooperation between all member countries, strictly within the limits of existing laws in different countries and in the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Topic B Context

Cocoa production provides a major source of income for rural communities in West Africa, especially in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, which are two of the world's top cocoa-producing nations. The sector has, however, long been plagued by concerns regarding child labor, dangerous working conditions, and the trafficking of children. In order to grasp the problem, it is necessary to draw a distinction between these various types of exploitation. Generally speaking, child labor means work which is harmful to children or which interferes with their education and growth, even though not every activity carried out by a child on a family farm would be considered child labor according to international standards. The age of the child, the type of work, the conditions under which it is carried out, and its impact on schooling are all factors to consider. Hazardous child labor consists of work which could endanger a child's health, safety or development. In the case of cocoa production, the hazards reported include the use of sharp tools, carrying heavy loads, exposure to agrochemicals, and carrying out land-clearing operations. Child trafficking and forced labor are related but different: trafficking refers to the recruitment, movement, transfer, harboring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation, while forced labor means work that is imposed under the threat of a penalty and without the child's voluntary consent.

A key source of evidence concerning the matter is a study carried out by the NORC at the University of Chicago for the U.S. Department of Labor. During the 2018–2019 cocoa harvest season, the researchers administered surveys and interviewed 2,809 heads of households and 5,552 children in cocoa-producing regions of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. The study showed that over one-third of the children in cocoa-growing families in Côte d'Ivoire and just over half of those in Ghana were engaged in cocoa farming. The researchers also stated that almost all the children taking part in cocoa-related work carried out at least one hazardous activity; the hazards reported were sharp tools (36%), carrying heavy loads (29%), agrochemicals (24%), and land-clearing operations (19%). It cannot be dealt with merely by relying on law enforcement since factors such as household poverty, limited access to education, the availability of labor, and the state of working conditions in

agriculture can affect children's involvement in cocoa production. A large number of cocoa farms are run by smallholder farmers, and families might encounter financial difficulties which stop them from being able to employ adult workers, buy equipment, or secure a steady household income. Policies that spot children engaged in hazardous work without taking into account these underlying pressures are unlikely to lead to real and lasting improvements.

Yet the economic situation does not provide a reason for trafficking, forced labor, or having children take part in hazardous work. Any effective response has to safeguard children while at the same time considering family support, access to education, labor standards, and the economic conditions of the farming communities. There are further difficulties arising from cocoa supply chains since cocoa can go through farmers, cooperatives, local buyers, exporters, processors, manufacturers, and retailers before it reaches the end consumer. Companies might buy cocoa via a number of intermediaries, which makes it hard to find out about the working conditions linked to specific products. Monitoring and traceability systems can assist in identifying risks, but on their own they are not enough. Identification must be linked to remediation, education, social services, and follow-up. The 2024–2029 Framework of Action for Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire contains measures to strengthen child labor monitoring and remediation systems, improve traceability, expand access to education and social services, and support household income. The main function of INTERPOL is that of facilitating cooperation in the field of law enforcement. It can assist national authorities in sharing information, coordinating cross-border investigations, and in building up their investigative capabilities when suspected trafficking networks operate across different jurisdictions. However, it does not establish labor standards, regulate cocoa companies, or run child-protection services. Carrying out these tasks necessitates working with national governments, labor inspectors, social workers, education authorities, international organizations and businesses. Delegates should consider how police investigations can link children and families with the appropriate protection and support, not see the identification or rescue of children as the only measure of success.

TOPIC B Case Examples:

Harkin-Engel Protocol

In 2001, media accounts and public worry led to greater attention being given to the accusations of abusive child labor and trafficking in cocoa production in West Africa. As a result, U.S. Senator Tom Harkin, Representative Eliot Engel, and people from the chocolate industry reached the Harkin-Engel Protocol, which was signed in September 2001. The purpose of the agreement was to combat the most severe forms of child labor in the cocoa industry by promoting cooperation between the industry, governments, labor organizations and civil-society groups. It contained commitments to establish industry-wide standards, to carry out independent monitoring and reporting, and to set up a system for public certification of labor practices in cocoa production. The agreement was voluntary and not a binding international treaty, and it was negotiated as a public-private initiative. Although congressional proposals had considered the introduction of a label showing that chocolate was produced without child slavery, discussion with the industry and other stakeholders resulted in the choice of a voluntary agreement instead. The intended method was to prompt companies to improve their labor practices and give consumers more information, while also involving governments and other organizations with experience in labor rights and the protection of children. Later actions involved research, monitoring, training and further cooperation between the governments that produce cocoa and the industry. The protocol succeeded in getting child labor in cocoa production recognized on the international policy agenda and prompted businesses to take part in concerted action. Yet because it was voluntary and due to the complexity of cocoa supply chains, implementation and accountability proved to be problematic. It is difficult to carry out certification and monitoring over such a large number of small farms, and having a label or an industry commitment does not in itself guarantee that all children are protected. This issue has an impact on children who work on farms, the families who are engaged in farming, the cocoa-producing communities, the governments which are responsible for labor protections, and the companies whose supply chains rely on cocoa. The Harkin-Engel Protocol shows the way in which voluntary agreements can get

parties involved, but also highlights the need for such commitments to include clear responsibilities, measures of progress, monitoring, and easy access to remediation. Delegates should think about how international cooperation can promote corporate accountability without adopting policies that merely exclude farmers from supply chains and don't tackle the economic conditions which lead to child labor in the first place.



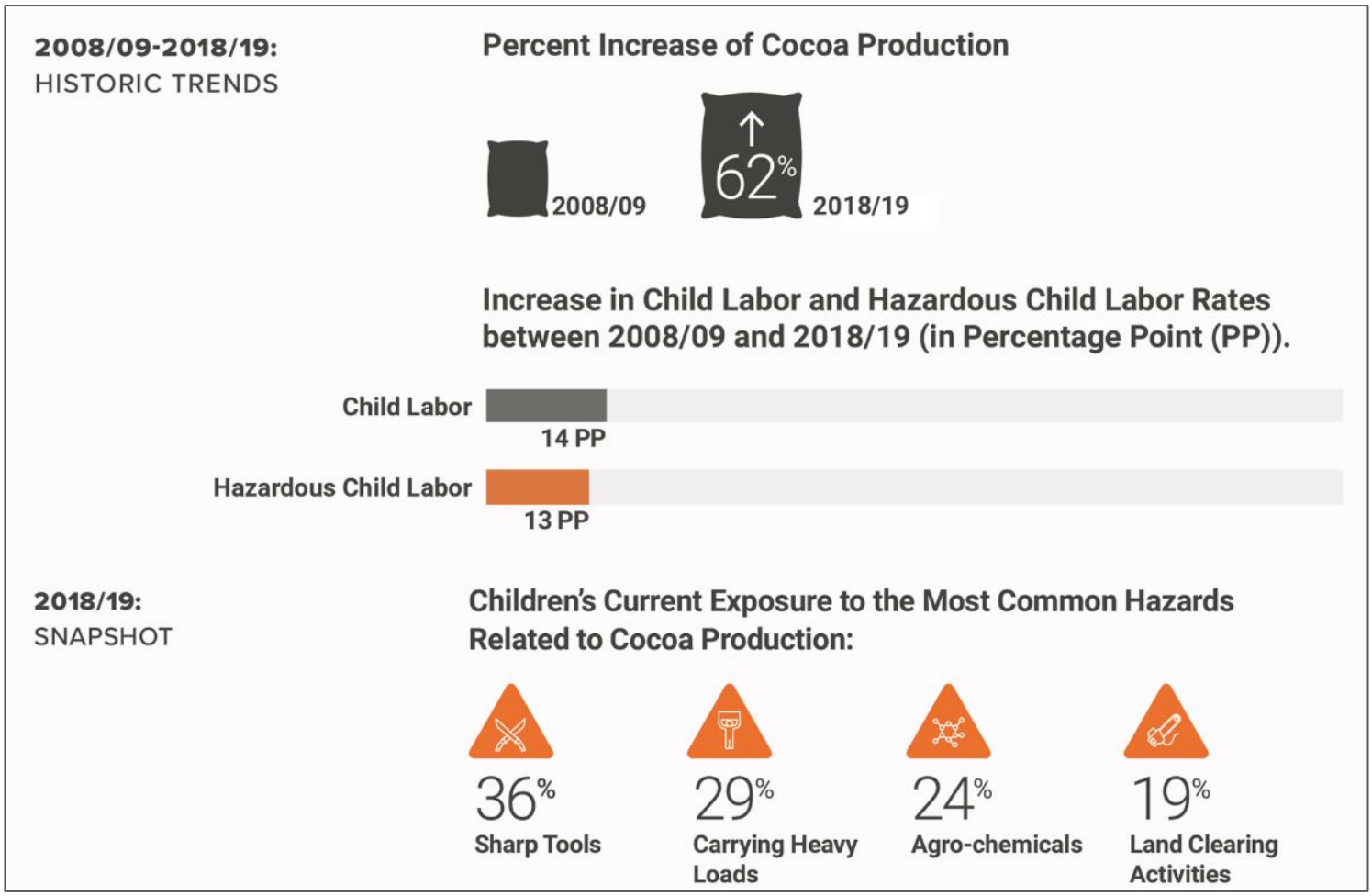
[6] Child labor on cocoa farm.

INTERPOL Operation BIA

In June 2009, INTERPOL worked together with the police authorities of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana as part of Operation BIA, a two-day operation aimed at combating the illegal recruitment and exploitation of children in cocoa and palm plantations. Almost 300 Ivorian police officers took part in it. The police teams went to certain plantations which were suspected of employing child labor illegally, and at the same time the officers examined vehicles moving along the main routes from Ghana for possible child victims.

The operation was organized by INTERPOL's Regional Bureau in Abidjan in collaboration with the Ghanaian and Ivorian police. By means of local intelligence the investigators were able to locate the plantations to be inspected, and specially trained officers interviewed children in order to obtain information on recruitment and exploitation. This method combined cross-border coordination with local knowledge. It was not a long-term initiative, but rather a focused action aimed at identifying victims, arresting suspects who were believed to be involved in recruiting children, and gaining a better understanding of the regional trafficking networks. As a result, 54 children from seven different nationalities were rescued and eight people suspected of taking part in illegal child recruitment were arrested. INTERPOL stated that some of the children, who were between 11 and 16 years of age, had described working long hours, having to carry heavy loads and receiving neither wages nor education. Operation BIA proved that it is possible for children to be moved across borders and lured into work under coercive circumstances. It also revealed the

shortcomings of relying solely on enforcement measures. While rescuing children and arresting suspected traffickers can stop exploitation in the short term, long-term protection might need to include safe accommodation, education, family tracing where appropriate, social services, and assistance for the affected households.



[7] NORC tracked trends of cocoa production and child labor.

TOPIC B: QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

How can authorities ensure that children identified during an operation receive appropriate protection, education access, and follow-up support?

What unintended consequences could result from excluding farms or communities from supply chains after child labor is identified?

How can governments improve information-sharing without exposing children's identities or sensitive family information?

What forms of training could help national police identify potential trafficking and forced-labor cases while conducting child-sensitive investigations?

How can INTERPOL contribute to the law-enforcement aspects of existing frameworks while avoiding duplication of the ILO's labor-standard work or UNICEF's child-protection role?

UN PAST ACTIONS

West Africa Cocoa and Commercial Agriculture Programme (2002–2006): The ILO implemented this in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, and Nigeria. The programme addressed hazardous and exploitative child labor in cocoa and commercial agriculture. Its work included research on child labor, occupational safety hazards, community-based monitoring, and training resources for educators and agricultural cooperatives.

"Towards Child Labour-Free Cocoa-Growing Communities," (2010–2015): This implemented project was funded by the U.S. Department of Labor and had a budget of $1 million US dollars. It aimed to address child labor through an integrated approach in cocoa-growing communities rather than focusing on individual farms or isolated violations.

Framework of Action for Cocoa-Growing Communities in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana (2024-2029): On November 27, 2024, the governments of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, the World Cocoa Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Labor signed a 2024–2029 Framework of Action through the Child Labor in Cocoa Coordinating Group. The ILO reported on the agreement, which aims to prevent and progressively eliminate child labor in cocoa-growing communities through coordinated action. This is a multi-stakeholder framework, not an initiative led by the UN alone.

TOPIC B APPENDIX & SOURCES

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