

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

January 9, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

Recent reporting from The Outlaw Ocean Project provides compelling visual evidence underscoring the substantial proof linking forced labor to a Chinese conglomerate known as the Chishan Group. The evidence implicates its fishing fleet and associated processing plants, particularly Shandong Haidu and Rongcheng Haibo, which collectively handle 30 percent of China's squid production and contribute to 17 percent of squid exported to the United States.<sup>1</sup> While some brands have already severed their connections with these implicated facilities, numerous other companies are still entwined with Chishan and have remained silent on the reporting.

China plays an outsized role in the processing and export of seafood, which is concerning due to the prevalence of forced labor or illegal fishing on Chinese fishing vessels and forced labor within Chinese processing plants. The Chishan Group has a prominent position in the global seafood market as the foremost private entity in China's squid industry and a major exporter to the United States, having shipped over 18,000 tons of seafood products since 2018.<sup>2</sup> Chishan's extensive operations span ownership of forty fishing ships, significant processing facilities, and several transshipment refrigeration vessels that have been tied to illegal fishing operations. There is also compelling evidence linking its processing plants to forced labor from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, a practice prohibited for products exported to the United States and European Union.<sup>3</sup>

Alarming, Sysco Corporation—the largest broadline food service distributor in the United States—is among those still connected to the Chishan Group and one of their seafood processors Rongcheng Haibo. We were pleased to hear that Sysco Corporation cut ties with one of these processors, Shandong Haidu, as of December 14, 2023, following news that Congressman Huffman's office was taking action regarding this matter. While this is a step in righting these injustices, Sysco Corporation must be held accountable for severing *all* ties with the Chishan Group and many other players in their supply chain tied to illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and forced labor, to ensure their entire seafood supply chain is untainted. While Sysco Corporation is not the only company implicated, its ties are of particular concern to us, as the United States government holds substantial contracts with Sysco Corporation. For example,

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<sup>1</sup> Urbina, Ian. *The Outlaw Project*. Bait-to-Plate. <https://www.theoutlawocean.com/investigations/china-the-superpower-of-seafood/bait-to-plate/>

<sup>2</sup> Urbina, Ian. November 30, 2023. *The Outlaw Ocean Project*. The Chishan Group. <https://www.theoutlawocean.com/investigations/china-the-superpower-of-seafood/videos/the-chishan-group/>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Sysco Corporation is one of the food distributors that supplies the food service companies Sodexo<sup>4</sup>, KSC Inc., Restaurant Alliance<sup>5</sup>, and I.L. Creations<sup>6</sup>, which serve lawmakers, staff, and visitors throughout the United States Capitol and Executive Office Buildings. It is quite possible that we have unknowingly been served seafood products tainted by IUU fishing and forced labor.

Sysco Corporation also currently holds contracts with various Federal agencies for their operations across the country. Some contracts extend until 2028 and include Sysco Corporation providing food distribution services involving fish and other seafood products.<sup>7</sup> The Bureau of Indian Education, Defense Logistics Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Department of Agriculture, Indian Health Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Department of the Army, and Department of Veterans Affairs<sup>8</sup> can all be linked to Sysco Corporation's tainted seafood distribution chain. This means that our nation's military trainees, veterans, federal employees, and tribal nations have also likely unknowingly been provided with seafood products directly connected to forced labor and IUU fishing within Sysco Corporation's supply chain.

Further, Sysco Corporation has recently revealed systemic flaws in the overall auditing processes of the seafood industry. This is a cause for concern; first, as it relates to the depth in which audits are carried out, and second, as it relates to auditors asking specific questions to identify forced labor in processing plants in China. These concerns were laid out in a [letter to Sysco](#) on Thursday, December 14, 2023, following a meeting with staff members of Congressman Huffman's office. As you will see in that letter, these issues shed light on a clear oversight of U.S. law and procedures by not complying with the *Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act* (UFLPA) and the *Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act* (CAATSA).

This illustrates a systemic failure of the United States' approach to tackling IUU fishing and supply chain forced labor, as well as Sysco Corporation's internal audit and accountability procedures. Until Sysco Corporation *fully* addresses these allegations and severs connections to *all* companies associated with forced labor on land and at sea, the United States must terminate its relationship with the company.

The Outlaw Ocean Project's latest investigation found that the Chishan Group's situation is not isolated, revealing that numerous seafood companies are entangled in various issues related to forced labor and/or illegal fishing. The pervasive nature of these problems necessitates a comprehensive reevaluation of how the global seafood industry monitors its supply chains, particularly those passing through China. We have discovered major gaps in our federal process: limitations and failures of the Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP), cross-jurisdictional confusion and data sharing impediments, definitions of IUU that do not include forced labor, and struggles to implement a whole of government approach throughout the entire seafood supply

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<sup>4</sup> Inc., CaterTrax. Cafés. *US House of Representatives*. <https://thehouse.misofi.net/>

<sup>5</sup> *Architect of the Capitol*. Senate Restaurants. <https://www.aoc.gov/about-us/organizational-structure/office-chief-operations/senate-office-buildings-jurisdiction/senate-restaurants>

<sup>6</sup> *HigherGov*. Cafeteria services-new Executive Office Building and Eisenhower Executive Office Building. <https://www.highergov.com/contract-opportunity/cafeteria-services-new-executive-office-building-a-47pm1022r0014-o-f480b/>

<sup>7</sup> *HigherGov*. Federal Contract Awards. <https://www.highergov.com/contract/?searchID=d4KQfR7h2v3QJq0E955pU>

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*.

chain, including on land and at sea. All of which have contributed to the rampant scourge of IUU fishing and forced labor practices tainting our seafood supply chain.

The United States government has inadvertently expended over \$200 million in the past five years on seafood associated with Uyghur labor for public food programs.<sup>9</sup> This issue transcends industry challenges; it constitutes a moral and ethical crisis that tarnishes the very fabric of our society. Congress and your administration cannot turn a blind eye to the gravity of this situation. The exploitation of vulnerable populations, the shortcomings in oversight mechanisms, and the unwitting involvement of government programs perpetuating this cycle demand our urgent attention and a unified commitment to rectify this egregious wrong.

We urge the Biden administration to demand that Sysco Corporation immediately sever all ties with the Chishan group and commit to improved practices to avoid being a part of the scourge of IUU fishing. Otherwise, we request that the United States government terminate its relationship with Sysco Corporation. Even further, we call on the administration to prohibit the Federal Government from acquiring or obtaining any seafood product from companies with substantiated connections to IUU fishing or forced labor; including prohibiting entering into, extending, or renewing contracts with entities involved in the importation or distribution of seafood products produced through IUU fishing or forced labor.

Sincerely,



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Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress



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Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress

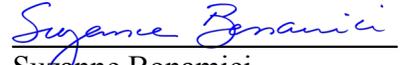
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<sup>9</sup> Urbina, Ian. October 9, 2023. *The New Yorker*. The Uyghurs Forced to Process the World's Fish. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-uyghurs-forced-to-process-the-worlds-fish>



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Raja Krishnamoorthi  
Ranking Member  
Select Committee on  
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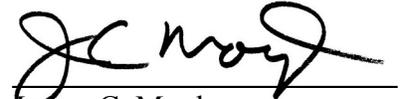
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Suzanne Bonamici  
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Suzan K. DelBene  
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*Jennifer Wexton*

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