



News

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SSA Asks Labor Department to Add Indian Shrimp to Forced/Child Labor Lists

Today, the Southern Shrimp Alliance formally requested that the Bureau of International Labor Affairs of the U.S. Department of Labor (ILAB) add Indian shrimp to the 2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor and, separately, to the List of Products Produced by Forced or Indentured Child Labor.

The Southern Shrimp Alliance's request is based on the publication of multiple reports regarding labor abuses in the Indian shrimp industry. Specifically, in the last week, Corporate Accountability Lab published Hidden Harvest: Human Rights and Environmental Abuses in India's Shrimp Industry, detailing the results of its three-year investigation into labor practices at all levels of the Indian shrimp supply chain. At the same time, the Associated Press published a story by Martha Mendoza, Mahesh Kumar, and Piyush Nagpal, AP Finds Grueling Conditions in Indian Shrimp Industry that Report Calls "Dangerous and Abusive," providing eye-witness accounts of conditions in India's infamous peeling sheds that operate as the unmentioned backbone of the country's peeled shrimp capacity. And The Outlaw Ocean Project published India Shrimp: A Growing Goliath, derived partly from the courageous actions of a whistleblower, Joshua Farinella, who has made public extensive documentation indicating that an Indian exporter held workers against their will on the grounds of its processing facility.

These reports, in turn, confirmed the findings of ELEVATE (an LRQA company) after their investigation of the Indian shrimp industry based on site visits conducted in November and December 2022. ELEVATE published Human Rights Impact Assessment: Farmed Shrimp in India in May 2023, noting that they found evidence of workers in the Indian shrimp industry being held against their will, forced to work overtime and excessive hours without pay, and subject to debt bondage. ELEVATE observed that the problems within the Indian shrimp industry required a broad-based response from those purchasing Indian shrimp.

That call to action was unheeded.

As importers have continued to profit from the widespread suffering caused by exploitation in India's shrimp industry, the Southern Shrimp Alliance believes that the federal government must act.

Moreover, while the Southern Shrimp Alliance has previously asked for products to be added to List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor, this is the first time the organization has ever requested that a product be added to ILAB's List of Products Produced by Forced or Indentured Child Labor. That request is based on the discovery that Indian shrimp is being shipped to the United States under the "Freedom's Choice" label, a brand sold in Defense Commissaries at U.S. military bases around the world.

"Enough is enough," said John Williams, Executive Director of the Southern Shrimp Alliance. "ILAB's reports already recognize that no country in the world presents a greater risk of child and forced labor than India. It is well past time for the federal government to recognize what is obvious to everyone that looks – the 'Product of India' label on bags of shrimp in your local grocery store is a mark of unimaginable human suffering."

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