

## Civil Society Groups Urge Global Adoption of Import Bans Against Products Made Using Forced Labour

*Governments in the EU, UK, Australia, Japan, Canada, Mexico, and other regions must act immediately to end corporate complicity in forced labour, including state-imposed forced labour*

On International Human Rights Day, civil society groups, including members of the [Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region](#), the [Coalition Against Forced Labour in Trade](#) and the [Cotton Campaign](#), call on countries around the world, especially major trading countries in the G7 and G20, to restrict the importation of goods produced in whole, or in part, by forced labour, including state-imposed forced labour contexts such as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Uyghur Region) and Turkmenistan. Import bans, in combination with policies and legislation governing supply chains and human rights due diligence, have the power to eliminate forced labour from supply chains, by creating a level playing field in changing corporate behaviour, requiring suppliers to provide workers with remedy, and increasing pressure on authoritarian governments to end their abusive practices.

The 2022 International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates show that an estimated 17.3 million individuals are experiencing forced labour in the private sector. These figures demonstrate the predictable result of global supply chains concentrated in markets with low wages and often lax labour laws, which rewards a ‘race to the bottom’ approach. In addition, the ILO estimates that approximately four million people are in state-imposed forms of forced labour, which, even at this scale, is likely an underestimate.

In the Uyghur Region, the government of China is [perpetrating human rights abuses](#) on a massive scale, targeting the Uyghur population and other Turkic and Muslim-majority peoples on the basis of their religion and ethnicity. Under the guise of “fighting terrorism”, these measures have included the arbitrary mass detention of an estimated 1 to 1.8 million Uyghurs in internment camps (termed “re-education” camps by the Chinese Government). In addition, there are an [estimated](#) hundreds of thousands of Uyghur people in other forms of arbitrary detention. Systematic forced labour systems, both within detention systems and through state-led labour transfer programmes, are central to, and enabling of, the Chinese Government’s control over the Uyghur Region and its citizens, in furtherance of its objectives to assimilate Uyghur people and remove their identity. Research shows that state-imposed Uyghur forced labour is widespread within the supply chains of [17+ global industries](#). Further, all cotton originating in Turkmenistan is produced within a state-imposed forced labour system. Since [2018](#), the U.S. government has prohibited the importation of goods made in whole, or in part, with Turkmen cotton.

Import bans can be a powerful policy tool to deter forced labour in supply chains. Under the U.S. Tariff Act of 1930, U.S. Customs officials have stopped [thousands of shipments](#) at ports across the country. In fiscal year 2023, the U.S. government stopped 4,415 shipments valued at 1.44 billion USD for various forced labour enforcement actions. Under the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act ([UFLPA](#)), U.S. Customs has [targeted](#) a whopping two billion dollars worth of

electronics, apparel, manufacturing materials, chemicals, and other goods linked to Uyghur forced labour. But goods blocked from the U.S. are being [diverted](#) to other markets. In the case of Uyghur forced labour, some companies are [bifurcating their supply chains](#), meaning that they are redirecting forced labour-tainted goods to non-US markets rather than ceasing to source from the Uyghur Region altogether. We need to urgently replicate and build on successful legislation like the U.S. Tariff Act and the UFLPA to ensure that countries around the world refuse market access to products made using forced labour, and by extension, to companies that make these goods and profit from such practices.

The U.S. import bans have also led to improvements in the lives of workers, pressured companies to conduct better due diligence, and catalysed international policy changes and labour reforms. Migrant workers in Malaysia and elsewhere were able to recover at least [200 million dollars](#) in back wages and recruitment fee reimbursements on the back of Tariff Act enforcement. Due to the legal risks created by the U.S. Tariff Act and the UFLPA, forced labour in supply chains is prioritised as a [top-tier compliance](#) issue that goes straight to the C-suite. Weak, voluntary, window-dressing measures will no longer hold water.

A few jurisdictions are considering similar policy approaches:

- Canada enacted a similar import prohibition against products manufactured using forced labour in July 2020. While this legislation is encouraging and a step in the right direction, Canada is lagging on enforcement. The government has so far made only one public detention of a shipment linked to forced labour, which was subsequently released into the Canadian market.
- Mexico recently announced an import ban of its own, and we encourage the government to be transparent on the implementation process. We look forward to how this law will transform the supply chains of companies selling in the Mexican market.
- In 2022, the European Commission announced a proposal for a forced labour product prohibition, and recently, the European Parliament voted on its subsequent position. This law has enormous potential to tackle forced labour in supply chains, however, there is a risk that the EU Forced Labour Regulation will fail to address contexts of [state-imposed forced labour](#), such as that in the Uyghur Region or in Turkmenistan.

Unfortunately, most governments around the world are dragging their feet when it comes to meaningfully tackling corporate complicity in forced labour. Organisations represented here are committed to advancing import bans against goods made with forced labour perpetrated by private and state actors. We urge governments and the global trade community to join us and take a decisive stand against forced labour in the new year by supporting robust implementation and harmonisation of import bans against products manufactured wholly or in part with forced labour. No country in the world should serve as a safe harbour for goods made using forced labour.

1. Advocates for Public Interest Law (APIL)
2. Anti-Slavery International
3. ASTRA Anti-trafficking Action
4. Be Slavery Free
5. Campaign for Uyghurs
6. Corporate Accountability Lab
7. Dalit Solidarity Network UK (DSN UK)
8. Ethical Apparel Africa (EAA) Limited
9. Ethical Consumer Research Association
10. European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR)
11. Fair Trade Advocacy Office (FTAO)
12. Fairtrade International
13. Forum For Human Rights (FFHR)
14. Freedom United
15. Fundación Libera contra la Trata de Personas y la Esclavitud en Todas sus Formas
16. Global Apparel Training Association (GATA)
17. Global Fund to End Modern Slavery
18. Global Labor Justice - International Labor Rights Forum
19. Global Legal Action Network (GLAN)
20. Human Rights Law Centre
21. Humanity United
22. Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility
23. Investor Alliance for Human Rights
24. Jewish Movement for Uyghur Freedom
25. Justice and Care
26. La Strada International - European NGO Platform against Human Trafficking
27. Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies
28. No Business With Genocide
29. Polaris
30. Proyecto de Derechos Economicos, Sociales y Culturales (ProDESC, Mexico)
31. Social Awareness and Voluntary Education (SAVE)
32. The Human Trafficking Legal Center
33. The McCain Institute
34. Transparentem
35. Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights
36. Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania
37. Unseen
38. Uyghur American Association
39. Uyghur Center for Democracy and Human Rights
40. Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP)
41. Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project (URAP)
42. Verité
43. Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation
44. Women Working Worldwide
45. World Uyghur Congress