

EMANUEL CLEAVER, II
FIFTH DISTRICT, MISSOURI

FINANCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE
HOUSING AND INSURANCE SUBCOMMITTEE
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

December 16, 2015

Mr. Thomas E. Perez
Secretary of Labor
United States Department of Labor
200 Constitution Ave. NW
Washington DC 20210

Dr. Stephen Ostroff
Acting Commissioner of Food and Drugs
United States Food and Drug Administration
10903 New Hampshire Ave.
Silver Spring, MD 20993

Dear Secretary of Labor and Acting FDA Commissioner of Food and Drugs:

I am deeply concerned for the welfare of adult and children shrimp peelers in Thailand who are forced to work in one of the most abhorrent slavery schemes of the 21st century. Recent reports from the United Nations, the European Union, the US State Department, and international labor organizations have all detailed the repugnant use of slave labor in the Thai shrimp processing industry. A detailed report released by the Associated Press just this month revealed particularly illustrative and gruesome testimony of former slave workers: human trafficking, forced labor, debt bondages, filthy sub-human working conditions, child endangerment, unlivable wages, and even death. The list of human rights violations is both extensive and foul.

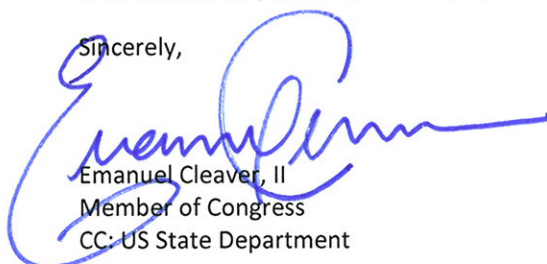
While human trafficking and forced labor are not unique to Thailand, the reports concerning the shrimp peeling industry in Thailand are impossible to ignore. And what is perhaps most troubling is the alleged involvement of United States corporations in the operation. United States Customs records show that Thai shrimp imported from slavery tainted supply lines has made its way into United States restaurants, universities, hospitals, pet stores, and some of the United States' largest retailers. While some American companies such as Nestle have cut ties with Thai processors associated with slavery, others have admitted to a lack of awareness.

Although international actors have begun to take steps to address the injustices, I urge that more should be done. I respectfully request that the US Food and Drug Administration and the US Department of Labor launch full investigations into US companies doing business with Thai shrimp processors known to be associated with slavery, and implement the administrative actions that are available to punish companies that associate themselves with slave labor. In order to compensate for the State Department's inability to institute an outright ban on importing shrimp processed by forced labor, other departments can and must increase transparency and accountability in the Thai shrimp distribution chain.

This year our country celebrated the 150th anniversary of the passage of the 13th Amendment; an amendment formally abolishing slavery in the United States. Although our nation has come a long way, there are those in Thailand who will wake up tomorrow to experience this nightmare for themselves. We cannot abolish slavery from our own front yard only to see similar crimes against humanity supported in the yard of our neighbors.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. If I can be of any assistance please do not hesitate to contact me at my office 202.225.4535.

Sincerely,


Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress
CC: US State Department

PLEASE REPLY TO:

☐ 2335 RAYBURN HOB
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-4535 (PHONE)
(202) 225-4403 (FAX)

☐ 101 WEST 31ST STREET
KANSAS CITY, MO 64108
(816) 842-4545 (PHONE)
(816) 471-5215 (FAX)

☐ 211 WEST MAPLE AVENUE
INDEPENDENCE, MO 64050
(816) 833-4545 (PHONE)
(816) 833-2991 (FAX)

☐ 1923 MAIN STREET
HIGGINSVILLE, MO 64037
(660) 584-7373 (PHONE)
(660) 584-7227 (FAX)



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