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## **How You Can Love Chocolate Without Guilt**

**By Zack Gross**

I love chocolate - it may be an addiction! Many of us Dads and Granddads will be eating chocolate today, and into the foreseeable future, thanks to the love and generosity of our families and friends on Father's Day.

Not only are there numerous chain and specialty stores out there to sell you chocolate by the box, the bar, the bag or the bunny. But there are also many on-line sites, geared up for this special day, from which you can order chocolate bricks emblazoned with "No.1 Dad" or chocolate ties with "I Love Dad!" You can even order "virtual chocolate"! You can send your Dad, or anyone else, a computer generated greeting card, or computer monitor wallpaper, a chocolate-related verse and much more to celebrate the love of chocolate.

It's too bad that this sweet substance has been so closely associated with exploitation and war in recent years. A new report entitled *Hot Chocolate* released by Global Witness - a London-based organization which "breaks the links between natural resources, conflict and corruption" - has exposed how revenue from the cocoa trade has helped to fuel many years of conflict in Ivory Coast.

As the world's largest producer of cocoa, the main ingredient in chocolate, Ivorians produce 40% of the world's cocoa and that amounts to 35% of the total value of that country's exports. It is estimated that four million people in the Ivory Coast are involved in the cocoa industry.

The Leonardo de Caprio movie *Blood Diamond* popularized the concern that diamonds have been used to fuel conflicts in Africa, in that case in Sierra Leone and Liberia. This movie and other related publicity have made life difficult for diamond exporters and sellers, as some countries now won't allow African diamonds and many consumers won't buy them. Oil, timber, and other minerals have also been implicated in conflict situations, where natural resources are exchanged for armaments or cash for arms between corporations and African government and militant leaders.

Over the past five years, the cocoa region, particularly Ivory Coast, has been a civil war zone with a portion of cocoa revenue – as much as US\$118 million - funding both sides, with the quiet acceptance, if not active participation, of US and European-based companies. It is estimated that at least US\$58 million in government cocoa revenues has gone directly into the war effort via "patterns of mismanagement of revenues, opacity of accounts, corruption and political favouritism."

Rebel forces have raised at least US \$30 million by "taxing" the movement of cocoa and controlling the cocoa trade in the north of the country. On both sides, funds

“raised” by competing sides in the conflict through the cocoa trade have also lined the pockets of government and rebel officials. It has not all gone to supporting political causes! Large chocolate companies, such as the US-based Archer Daniels Midland and the French Bollere are implicated by Global Witness as a party to the diversion of these funds.

And, there is a Canadian connection! Quebec journalist Guy-Andre Kieffer, who was investigating the connection between the cocoa trade and conflict in Ivory Coast, disappeared in April of 2004 and has never been seen again. His colleagues believe that Kieffer was killed because of a series of embarrassing articles that he had written about Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo, and the last person who saw Kieffer alive is said to be a relative of Gbagbo.

Global Witness proposes that cocoa exporting companies operating in Ivory Coast publish information on the origin of the cocoa they buy, carry out due diligence on purchase, disclose all payments to Ivorian cocoa traders and use their influence to prevent cocoa revenues from going into war chests. The companies, so far, have argued that they really have no control over the use of cocoa revenues. They add, as the diamond industry used to say about its product, that all cocoa beans are mixed together, so one can't label individual beans.

Of course, until world pressure brings the chocolate industry to heel on this and other issues, there is an alternative. In recent years, to combat the child slave trade that is used to harvest the Western African cocoa crop, interest and trade in “fair trade” chocolate has grown very quickly. Organizations such as UNICEF and Save the Children have spoken out against the cocoa industry's use of child labour and, in Europe and North America, companies and co-ops have sprung up to market a socially responsible product.

Fair trade chocolate – in bars, bags, boxes and hearts - is now readily available at outlets such as Ten Thousand Villages and the Marquis Project's Worldly Goods store in Brandon and TTV, Mountain Equipment Co-op, Organza and many others in Winnipeg. The price is coming down with economy of scale as sales volumes rise. This product is also organic and has a high cocoa content, making it a healthy option. This way, chocolate will no longer have to be associated with guilt!

It is exciting that consumers are gaining confidence in their ability to influence corporate and government policy by the choices they make. Companies that trade in diamonds or chocolate can no longer argue “the bottom line” or “there's nothing we can do.” We can hold these global players accountable, if we choose to.

The sweet taste of chocolate need not be tainted by the sour taste of tears and blood.

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