

United States Senate

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COMMITTEES:
AGRICULTURE
APPROPRIATIONS
HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS
SMALL BUSINESS

August 19, 2010

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am concerned that the Pentagon is reportedly poised to award a no-bid contract to Tremayne Consulting to expand market access for Afghan carpets. I agree it is important to promote sustainable economic development in Afghanistan. However, the program as publicly described in the *Washington Post* appears to have no safeguards to protect children from the worst forms of child labor. This would worsen, not improve the prospects for real development in Afghanistan, by subjecting the Afghan people to the predations of unsavory and exploitative elements of our own economy and that of Afghanistan.

Exploitative child labor contributes to massive illiteracy rates, a hobbled economy, and perpetuates the cycle of poverty. The very nature of exploitative child labor is such that it denies entire generations of children education and impedes economic development, including your Administration's commitment to the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals.

Specifically, the manufacture of carpets is an industry that is known for employing children in the worst forms of child labor. This includes Afghan carpets, which were included in the U.S. Department of Labor's 2009 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor. It is necessary to take clear and decisive action to certify that those benefitting from this contract do not use exploitative child labor and that goods made with the worst forms of child labor are not given preferential access to U.S. markets, which is in violation of U.S. law and ILO Convention 182, which the U.S. Senate ratified in 1999, and which Afghanistan ratified on April 7th this year.

This is an issue that I have been personally involved with for nearly 20 years. I have visited carpet factories throughout South Asia, and can personally attest that unless action is taken to certify that carpets are made without child labor, this contract will be using taxpayer money to subsidize the worst forms of child labor in Afghanistan. We cannot let this happen.

Fortunately, an established and effective standard to certify that carpets are made without the worst forms of child labor already exists. This established standard, GoodWeave, formerly known as Rugmark, can and should be used to certify that carpets given access to U.S. markets under this contract are free from exploitative child labor. GoodWeave's process assures that rug and carpet importers and exporters employ no one under age 14, allow unannounced random inspections by local inspectors, endeavor to pay fair wages to adult workers, and pay a licensing fee that helps support GoodWeave's monitoring, inspections and education programs. A condition of any contract awarded to the Afghan carpet industry should be to work in partnership with GoodWeave in order to achieve this standard of certification.

In addition to the apparent lack of child labor certification, I am also concerned about Tremayne Consulting. According to the *Washington Post*, Tremayne Consulting was recently set up for the purpose of receiving this contract. There is no mention of Tremayne having any background on the ground in Afghanistan or in working with credible child labor certification standards. Without proper certification in place this contract would cause both the U.S. and Afghan Governments to fail to meet the international obligations they have made under ILO Convention 182.

This matter is of great concern for me personally, as a member of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, and as Chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies, which funds of the Department of Labor's Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) – the office that oversees U.S. Government efforts to combat the worst forms of child labor. Therefore, I request that this contract be suspended until it can be certified that all of the carpets given access to U.S. markets under this contract are not made with the worst forms of child labor. This should be done in partnership with Goodweave and ILAB at our own Department of Labor.

Additionally, I also respectfully request to be briefed before September 1 about the Department of Defense contract with Tremayne Consulting and what, if any, measures were taken to certify that Afghan carpets made with the worst forms of child labor would not be given access to U.S. markets.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I fully share your goal to promote economic development in Afghanistan, including the carpet sector. In order to be effective, though, such development needs to be done in the right way. I am sure that you agree that it is in the economic interests of the United States and Afghanistan to live up to both our moral obligations and our international obligations under ILO Convention 182, and make certain that this contract does not encourage or reward the worst forms of child labor.

Sincerely,



Tom Harkin
United States Senator

Cc: The Honorable Robert M. Gates, Secretary of Defense
The Honorable Hilda L. Solis, Secretary of Labor

TH/tsb