



HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

“The Harvest is in My Blood”

Hazardous Child Labor in Tobacco Farming in Indonesia

SUMMARY

A boy's hands after harvesting tobacco leaves on a farm near Sampang, East Java.





“When we’re harvesting, I often feel sick because of the smell of the wet tobacco leaves, and I get a strong headache.... Sometimes it’s hard to breathe when there’s a lot of tobacco leaves near me. I can’t describe it. I get such a headache. I’m dizzy. I see stars, and everything just looks bright.”

“RADEN,” 14, SUMENER, EAST JAVA





A 15-year-old girl harvests tobacco leaves by hand on a farm near Sampang, East Java.

Ayu is a petite, soft-spoken 13-year-old girl from a village near Garut, in the mountains of West Java, Indonesia.¹ She is one of five children in her family, and her parents are farmers who cultivate tobacco and other crops on a small plot of land. “Since I was a kid, I’ve been going to the fields,” she said. “My parents plant tobacco. Mostly I help my parents and sometimes my neighbors. I have an older sister, an older brother, and two younger siblings. They help too.”

Ayu is in her first year of junior high school, and she mostly helps on the farm outside of school—early in the morning before classes, in the afternoons, and on weekends and holidays. But she told Human Rights Watch she occasionally missed school to work in tobacco farming. “My mom asked me to skip school last year when it was the harvest,” she said.

She told Human Rights Watch she vomits every year while harvesting tobacco:

I was throwing up when I was so tired from harvesting and carrying the [harvested tobacco] leaf. My stomach is like, I can’t explain, it’s stinky in my mouth. I threw up so many times.... My dad carried me home. It happened when we were harvesting. It was so hot, and I was so tired.... The smell is not good when we’re harvesting. I’m always throwing up every time I’m harvesting.

The symptoms she described—vomiting and nausea—are consistent with acute nicotine poisoning, an occupational illness specific to tobacco farming that occurs when workers absorb nicotine through their skin while having contact with tobacco plants.

Ayu also helps her father mix the toxic pesticides he applies to the tobacco. “I just put three or four cups of the chemical in the bucket, put in the water, and mix it with [a piece of] wood, and my dad puts it in the tank,” she explained. “The smell is so strong. It makes my stomach sick.” Like most of the farmers in her village, Ayu’s parents sell the tobacco they grow to the leader of their village, who pools together

¹ Ayu is a pseudonym, as are the names of all children quoted in this report.



A 11-year-old girl (front) and an 9-year-old girl (back) harvest tobacco on a farm near Sumenep, East Java.

tobacco from dozens of farmers, transports it to a warehouse in Central Java, and sells it to a tobacco trader there. The trader buys tobacco from many different suppliers, repackages it, and sells it on the open market to Indonesian and multinational tobacco manufacturing and leaf supply companies.

This report—based on extensive research including interviews with more than 130 children who work on tobacco farms in Indonesia—shows that child workers are being exposed to serious health and safety risks. The dangers include acute nicotine poisoning from contact with tobacco plants and leaves, and exposure to toxic pesticides and other chemicals. Few of the children we interviewed, or their parents, were trained on safety measures or knew the health

risks of the work. While Indonesian child labor laws are generally in line with international standards, our research shows that inadequate regulations and poor enforcement of the law, particularly in the small-scale farming sector, leave children at risk. The report concludes with detailed recommendations to the Indonesian government, tobacco companies, and other relevant players in the tobacco industry, including that authorities should immediately prohibit children from performing any tasks that involve direct contact with tobacco, and that companies should improve their human rights due diligence procedures to identify and end hazardous child labor on tobacco farms.

Indonesia is the world's fifth-largest tobacco producer, home to more than 500,000 tobacco farms nationwide. Though domestic and international laws prohibit children under 18 from performing hazardous work, thousands of children like Ayu work in hazardous conditions on tobacco farms in Indonesia, exposed to nicotine, toxic pesticides,

extreme heat, and other dangers. This work could have lasting consequences on their health and development.

The government of Indonesia has a strong legal and policy framework on child labor. Under national labor law, 15 is the standard minimum age for employment, and children ages 13 to 15 may perform only light work that is not dangerous and does not interfere with their schooling. Children under 18 are prohibited from performing hazardous work, including any work in environments “with harmful chemical substances.” Indonesia’s list of hazardous occupations prohibited for children does not specifically ban work handling tobacco. Human Rights Watch believes that available evidence demonstrates that any work involving direct contact with tobacco in any form constitutes work with harmful chemical substances, and should be prohibited for all children.

Nicotine is present in all parts of tobacco plants and leaves at all stages of production. Public health research has shown that tobacco workers absorb nicotine through their skin while handling tobacco, particularly when the plant is wet. Studies have found that non-smoking adult tobacco workers have similar levels of nicotine in their bodies as smokers in the general population. Nicotine is a toxin, and nicotine exposure has been associated with lasting adverse consequences on brain development. The use of protective equipment is insufficient to eliminate the dangers of working with tobacco and may lead to other dangers, such as heat illness.

Despite the domestic and international prohibitions on hazardous child labor, Human Rights Watch documented children engaging in hazardous work in tobacco farming in four Indonesian provinces, including the three provinces responsible for almost 90 percent of tobacco production each year: East Java, Central Java, and West Nusa Tenggara. Children we interviewed worked directly with tobacco plants, handled pesticides, and performed dangerous physical labor in extreme heat, putting them at risk of short and long-term health consequences.

Some of the hazards faced by child tobacco workers in Indonesia are not unique to tobacco farming. Children working in other crops may also be exposed to pesticides, work in high heat, and face other dangers. However, handling tobacco is inherently hazardous work for children, due to the nicotine in the plant, and tobacco farming inevitably requires workers to have significant contact with the plant during cultivation, harvesting, and curing.

Many Indonesian companies and the largest multinational tobacco companies in the world purchase tobacco grown in Indonesia and use it to manufacture tobacco products sold domestically and abroad. Several of the largest multinational tobacco companies in the world have acknowledged

the risks to children of participating in certain tasks on tobacco farms. These companies ban children under 18 from performing some of the most hazardous tasks on farms in their supply chains, such as harvesting tobacco or applying pesticides to the crop. But none of these companies have policies and procedures sufficient to ensure that tobacco entering their supply chains was not produced with hazardous child labor. As a result, these companies risk contributing to the use of, and benefitting from, hazardous child labor.

On three research trips between September 2014 and September 2015, Human Rights Watch interviewed a total of 227 people, including 132 children ages 8 to 17 who reported working on tobacco farms in 2014 or 2015, and 88 other individuals, such as parents of child workers, tobacco farmers, tobacco leaf buyers and sellers, warehouse owners, village leaders, health workers, representatives of nongovernmental organizations, and others. In addition, we met or corresponded with officials from several government bodies, including the Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the Indonesian Child Protection Commission.

Human Rights Watch sent letters to four Indonesian companies and nine multinational tobacco manufacturing and leaf supply companies, to share our research findings and request information on each company’s policies and practices regarding child labor in Indonesia. As detailed below, seven multinational companies responded in detail. We sent several letters and made numerous phone calls to each of the four Indonesian companies in an effort to secure a meaningful response, but none provided any substantive response. Human Rights Watch analyzed the human rights due diligence procedures of those companies that responded in detail to our letters as thoroughly as possible, based on information provided by the companies, publicly available information on their websites, and interviews with child workers, tobacco farmers, and traders in Indonesia.

Most of the children interviewed by Human Rights Watch started working in tobacco farming before age 15, the standard minimum age for employment in Indonesia. Approximately three quarters of the children we interviewed began working in tobacco farming by age 12. Most children worked on tobacco farms throughout the season, from planting through the harvest and curing process.

Children interviewed for this report typically worked on small plots of land farmed by their parents or other family members. In addition to working on land farmed by their families, many children also worked on land farmed by their neighbors and other members of their communities. Some children did not receive any wages for their work, either

because they worked for their own families or exchanged labor with other families in their communities. Other children received modest wages.

Children in all four provinces said that they worked in tobacco farming to help their families. The World Bank reports that 14.2 percent of Indonesia's rural population lives below the national poverty line, almost double the urban poverty rate. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), "poverty is the main cause of child labor in agriculture" worldwide. Human Rights Watch research found that family poverty contributed to children's participation in tobacco farming in Indonesia. "I want to help my parents make a living," said 11-year-old Ratih, who worked on her parents' tobacco farm in Jember, East Java. Sinta, a 13-year-old girl who worked on tobacco farms in her village in Magelang, Central Java, said, "I work so I can help my parents, to make life easier. To make it not such a difficult life."

"My kids are helping me in the field so I can save money on labor," said Ijo, a farmer in his mid-40s and father of four interviewed in Garut, West Java, in 2015. He said he was conflicted about his 12-year-old son helping him on the farm: "Of course I don't want my kids working in tobacco because there's a lot of chemicals on it, and it could harm my kids. But they wanted to work, and we are farmers.... I need more money to pay the laborers. But my son can help all season. You can imagine that I can save a lot of money when he joins me in the field. It's complicated."

Hazardous Work in Tobacco Farming

While not all work is harmful to children, the ILO defines hazardous work as "work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children." The ILO considers agriculture "one of the three most dangerous sectors in terms of work-related fatalities, non-fatal accidents, and occupational diseases."

Human Rights Watch found that many aspects of tobacco farming in Indonesia pose significant risks to children's health and safety. Children working on tobacco farms in Indonesia are exposed to nicotine, toxic pesticides, and extreme heat. The majority of children interviewed for this report described sickness while working in tobacco farming, including specific symptoms associated with acute nicotine poisoning, pesticide exposure, and heat-related illness, as described below. Some children reported respiratory symptoms, skin conditions, and eye irritation while working in tobacco farming.

All children interviewed for this report described handling and coming into contact with tobacco plants and leaves

containing nicotine. In the short term, absorption of nicotine through the skin can lead to acute nicotine poisoning, called Green Tobacco Sickness. The most common symptoms of acute nicotine poisoning are nausea, vomiting, headaches, and dizziness. Approximately half of the children we interviewed in Indonesia in 2014 or 2015 reported experiencing at least one symptom consistent with acute nicotine poisoning while working in tobacco farming. Many reported multiple symptoms. For example, Nadia, a 16-year-old girl in Bondowoso, East Java, said she vomits every year in the harvest season while bundling and sorting harvested tobacco leaves with other women and girls in her village. "Sometimes I get a headache. Sometimes I'm even throwing up ... [It happens] when we string the leaves because we're sitting in the middle of a bundle of tobacco.... It happens when the tobacco is still wet and just coming from the fields.... Every time it's the beginning of the season, we're throwing up."

Rio, a tall 13-year-old boy, worked on tobacco farms in his village in Magelang, Central Java, in 2014. He told Human Rights Watch, "After too long working in tobacco, I get a stomachache and feel like vomiting. It's from when I'm near the tobacco for too long." He likened the feeling to motion sickness, saying "It's just like when you're on a trip, and you're in a car swerving back and forth."

The long-term effects of nicotine absorption through the skin have not been studied, but public health research on smoking suggests that nicotine exposure during childhood and adolescence may have lasting consequences on brain development. The prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for executive function and attention, is one of the last parts of the brain to mature and continues developing throughout adolescence and into early adulthood. The prefrontal cortex is particularly susceptible to the impacts of stimulants, such as nicotine. Nicotine exposure in adolescence has been associated with mood disorders, and problems with memory, attention, impulse control, and cognition later in life.

Many child tobacco workers interviewed for this report also said they handled or applied pesticides, fertilizers, or other chemical agents to tobacco farms in their communities. Some children also reported seeing other workers apply chemicals in fields in which they were working, or in nearby fields. A number of children reported immediate sickness after handling or working in close proximity to the chemicals applied to tobacco farms.

Sixteen-year-old Musa, for example, said he used a tank and handheld sprayer to apply a liquid chemical to his family's tobacco farm in Garut, West Java, in 2015. He said he became very ill the first time he applied pesticides, after mixing the chemicals with his bare hands: "The first time, I was



vomiting.... For two weeks, I couldn't work. I went to the doctor. The doctor told me to stop being around the chemicals. But how can I do that? I have to help my parents. Who else can help them but me? ... I mixed it with my hands. Suddenly I was dizzy. My parents told me to go home. I stayed home for two days, and my dad told me to rest for longer. It was a terrible feeling. For two weeks, I was always, always vomiting."

Rahmad, a 10-year-old boy, described being exposed to pesticides while working on his family's farm in Sampang, East Java, in 2015, "When my brother is spraying, I am cleaning the weeds. It stinks.... It smells like medicine. I feel sick. I feel headaches, and not good in my stomach. I'm in the same field.... Every time I smell the spray I feel dizzy and nauseous."

Children are uniquely vulnerable to the adverse effects of toxic exposures as their brains and bodies are still developing. Pesticide exposure has been associated with long-term and chronic health effects including respiratory

An adult tobacco worker applies a pesticide to a tobacco farm near East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara.

problems, cancer, depression, neurologic deficits, and reproductive health problems. In particular, many pesticides are highly toxic to the brain and reproductive health system, both of which continue to grow and develop during childhood and adolescence.

Few of the children interviewed by Human Rights Watch said that they had received any education or training about the health risks of working in tobacco farming. Very few children said that they wore any type of protective equipment while handling tobacco, and many said they wore no or inadequate protective equipment while working with pesticides or other chemicals.



Child tobacco workers prepare to carry sticks of harvested tobacco leaves to a curing barn near East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara.

Many children described working in high heat on tobacco farms. Some children we interviewed said that they had fainted, and others said that they felt faint or dizzy or suffered headaches when working in very high temperatures. Working in extreme heat can place children at risk of heat stroke and dehydration, and children are more susceptible than adults to heat illness.

Most children interviewed reported that they suffered pain and fatigue from engaging in prolonged repetitive motions and lifting heavy loads. Some children also said they used sharp tools and cut themselves, or worked at dangerous heights with no protection from falls.

Impact on Education

Most children interviewed by Human Rights Watch said they attended school and worked in tobacco farming only outside of school hours—before and after school, and on weekends and school holidays. However, Human Rights Watch also found that work in tobacco farming interfered with schooling for some children.

A few children had dropped out of school before turning 15—the compulsory age for schooling in Indonesia—in order to work to help support their families. These children often said their families could not afford to put them through school, or relied on them to work. Even though the Indonesian government guarantees free public education, and interviewees in most communities said they did not have to pay school fees to attend public schools, the costs of books, uniforms, transportation to and from school were prohibitive for some families. For example, Sari, a bright-eyed, 14-year-old girl in Magelang, Central Java, told Human Rights Watch



she dreamed of becoming a nurse, but she stopped attending school after sixth grade in order to help support her family. “I want to go back to school to achieve my dreams for the future, but we don’t have much money to do that.”

Some children said they missed some days of school during busy times of the growing season. Eleven-year-old Rojo, the oldest child in his family, said he missed school to work in tobacco farming three or four times during the 2014 harvest season in Sampang, East Java: “My dad asked me to go to the field earlier, and not go to school,” he said. “I was worried I wouldn’t pass the exams.”

Some children interviewed said they found it difficult to combine school and work, and described fatigue and exhaustion or difficulty keeping up with schoolwork. Awan, a slender 15-year-old boy from Pamekasan, East Java, described how he balanced school and work during the high season: “When the harvest is coming, I have to wake up early in the morning, and I have to be [work] in the fields until 6:30 a.m., then go to school, and then continue in the fields in the

Students at a school near Sumenep, East Java. Many of the children’s parents cultivate tobacco, and some of the children work in tobacco farming before and after school.

afternoon.... We go [to the fields] around 4:30 or 5 a.m. It’s still dark, but I use a headlamp. I feel like I want to sleep longer. It’s tiring.” He told Human Rights Watch that this grueling schedule made it difficult for him to keep up with his schoolwork: “It’s harder to study than it is before the harvest,” he said. “It makes me so tired.”

Government Response

Under international law, the Indonesian government has an obligation to ensure that children are protected from the worst forms of child labor, including hazardous work, which is defined as “work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.”



A young girl ties tobacco leaves onto sticks to prepare them for curing in East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara.



Indonesia has ratified several international conventions concerning child labor, including the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, the ILO Minimum Age Convention, and the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention requires member states to take immediate action to prevent children from engaging in the worst forms of child labor and to provide direct assistance for the removal of children already engaged in the worst forms of child labor.

Indonesia has strong laws and regulations regarding child labor, aligned with international standards, and has implemented a number of social programs to address child labor. Under Indonesian law, the general minimum age for employment nationwide is 15. Children ages 13 to 15 may participate in light work as long as the work does not interfere with their physical, mental, or social development. Indonesian labor law prohibits hazardous work by everyone under 18, and a 2003 decree from the Minister of Manpower and Transmigration details the list of specific tasks that are prohibited for children under 18. The list explicitly prohibits children from working in environments “with harmful chemical substances.” Under this provision, any work involving direct contact with tobacco in any form should be considered prohibited due to the high probability of exposure to nicotine and pesticides.

However, gaps in the legal and regulatory framework, and inadequate enforcement of child labor laws and regulations leave children at risk. The Indonesian government’s hazardous work list does not specify that the prohibition on children’s work with harmful chemical substances includes work handling tobacco, despite the dangers of nicotine exposure. This ambiguity leaves children vulnerable.

In addition, the government of Indonesia does not effectively enforce child labor laws and regulations in the small-scale farming sector. The Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration—the agency responsible for the enforcement of child labor laws and regulations—has about 2,000 inspectors carrying out labor inspections nationwide, in all sectors, far too few for effective labor enforcement in a country of more than 250 million people. In a meeting with Human Rights Watch, a ministry representative explained that labor inspections are done only in large-scale agro-industry, not in the small-scale agricultural sector where the vast majority of children interviewed for this report worked.

Tobacco Supply Chain and Corporate Responsibility

While governments have the primary responsibility to respect, protect, and fulfill human rights under international law, private entities, including businesses, also have a responsibility to avoid causing or contributing to human rights abuse, and to take effective steps to ensure that any abuses that do occur are effectively remedied. This includes a responsibility to ensure that businesses' operations do not use, or contribute to the use of, hazardous child labor.

The United Nations (UN) Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which the UN Human Rights Council endorsed in 2011, maintain that all companies should respect human rights, avoid complicity in abuses, and ensure that any abuses that occur in spite of these efforts are adequately remedied. The guidelines, widely accepted as an authoritative articulation of businesses' human rights responsibilities, specify that businesses should carry out effective human rights due diligence, a process to identify potential risks of human rights abuse connected to their operations and take effective steps to prevent and mitigate negative human rights impacts linked to their operations. Businesses also have a responsibility to ensure that the victims of any abuses that occur in spite of these efforts are able to secure an appropriate remedy.

Tobacco grown in Indonesia enters the supply chains of Indonesian tobacco companies of various sizes, as well as the world's largest multinational tobacco companies. The largest companies operating in Indonesia include three Indonesian tobacco manufacturers—PT Djarum (Djarum), PT Gudang Garam Tbk (Gudang Garam), and PT Nojorono Tobacco International (Nojorono)—and two companies owned by multinational tobacco manufacturers—PT Bentoel Internasional Investama (Bentoel), owned by British American Tobacco (BAT), and PT Hanjaya Mandala Sampoerna Tbk (Sampoerna), owned by Philip Morris International. Other Indonesian and multinational companies also purchase tobacco grown in Indonesia, as described below.

Tobacco farmers interviewed by Human Rights Watch sold tobacco in a number of ways. Most farmers sold tobacco leaf on the open market through intermediaries, or “middlemen.” In this system, small farmers described selling tobacco to a central farmer or leader in the village, or a local buyer, who would pool tobacco from many small producers and sell it to warehouses owned by local businessmen or by larger national or multinational companies purchasing tobacco leaf.

As an alternative to this system, some farmers had relationships with individual tobacco companies and had

A man passes advertisements for popular brands of cigarettes as he transports tobacco with a horse-drawn cart in East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara.







A 13-year-old tobacco worker sits near a pile of dried tobacco leaves in East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara.



opportunities to sell tobacco directly to representatives of the company, rather than through intermediary traders. Under this system, some farmers signed written contracts to sell tobacco directly to tobacco product manufacturing or leaf supply companies.

Human Rights Watch interviewed more than 60 tobacco farmers, tobacco leaf buyers and sellers, and warehouse owners in the four provinces where we conducted research. We identified human rights risks, including child labor and occupational health and safety hazards, in both the open market system and the direct contracting system.

Most farmers and traders selling tobacco exclusively through the traditional open market system acknowledged that it was common for children to work in tobacco cultivation. Most of them stated that neither the government nor those purchasing tobacco leaf had ever communicated with them regarding child labor standards or expectations. Interviewees said that they were not aware of any attempts on the part of buyers, including companies with explicit policies that prohibit child labor, to verify the conditions in which tobacco was grown or inspect for child labor.

Farmers producing and selling tobacco through the direct contracting system said that they had received some training and education about child labor and health and safety from the tobacco companies with whom they contract. At the same time, Human Rights Watch found that companies' human rights due diligence practices were not sufficient to eliminate hazardous child labor in the supply chain. Most farmers in the direct contracting system reported that children under 18 still participated in many tobacco farming tasks, and some farmers insisted there were no restrictions at all on children's work in tobacco farming. Most farmers said there was no meaningful consequence or penalty if children were found working, even in the event of repeated violations. In the absence of any meaningful penalties, many farmers largely disregarded any efforts by companies to dissuade them from allowing children to work.

Human Rights Watch found that companies purchasing tobacco on the open market and through the direct contracting system risk purchasing tobacco produced by children working in hazardous conditions.

Human Rights Watch sought information regarding the human rights due diligence policies and procedures of 13 companies, including four Indonesian tobacco product manufacturers, seven multinational tobacco product manufacturers, and two multinational leaf merchant companies. Ten companies responded. Of the four Indonesian tobacco companies, two replied (Nojorono and Wismilak), but neither provided a detailed or comprehensive response to the questions we posed. A representative of Wismilak sent an email to Human Rights Watch stating that

the company could not respond in detail because it is not “directly connected with the tobacco farmers,” but did not identify other actors in the supply chain who are directly in contact with growers. Nojorono replied in a letter and referred Human Rights Watch to GAPPRI (Gabungan Perserikatan Pabrik Rokok Indonesia), a cigarette manufacturer’s association, for information regarding tobacco farming, including child labor. Human Rights Watch subsequently wrote to GAPPRI, but they declined to meet with us. The largest Indonesian tobacco companies, Djarum and Gudang Garam, did not respond to Human Rights Watch, despite repeated attempts to reach them.

All of the multinational companies purchasing tobacco from Indonesia that responded to Human Rights Watch have child labor policies that are largely aligned and appear consistent with international standards, in particular key ILO conventions. However, none of the companies prohibit children from performing all tasks that could pose threats to their health and safety. This means that none of the companies have policies sufficient to ensure that all children are protected from hazardous work on tobacco farms in their supply chains.

Human Rights Watch analyzed the information on human rights due diligence provided by those companies that responded to our letters. Few of the companies are sufficiently transparent regarding their human rights due diligence procedures, particularly regarding their monitoring of their child labor policies throughout the supply chain, as well as the results of internal monitoring and external audits. Transparency is a key element of effective and credible human rights due diligence. Among the companies we studied, Philip Morris International appears to have taken the greatest number of steps to be transparent about its human rights policies and monitoring procedures, including by publishing on its website its own progress reports as well as several detailed reports by third party monitors.

Most multinational tobacco companies operating in Indonesia source tobacco through a mix of direct contracts with farmers and purchasing tobacco leaf on the open market, with some companies relying more heavily on one or the other purchasing model. Many companies acknowledged that they carry out little or no human rights due diligence in the open market system. However, all companies sourcing tobacco from Indonesia have responsibilities to carry out robust human rights due diligence activity and ensure that their operations do not cause or contribute to human rights abuse, even in complex, multilayered supply chains. Although most of the companies who responded to Human Rights Watch acknowledged child labor and other human rights risks in the open market system, none of the companies described having procedures

A trader judges the quality of tobacco he purchases from another trader at a warehouse near Sumenep, East Java. He said he purchases tobacco from hundreds of farmers and traders and sells it to a cigarette manufacturer owned by a multinational tobacco company.









An 8-year-old girl sorts and bundles tobacco leaves by hand near Sampang, East Java.

in place that are sufficient to ensure that tobacco entering their supply chains was not produced with hazardous child labor.

The Way Forward

Based on the findings documented in this report, our analysis of international standards and public health literature, and interviews with experts on farmworker health, Human Rights Watch believes that any work involving direct contact with tobacco in any form should be considered hazardous and prohibited for children under 18, due to the health risks posed by nicotine, the pesticides applied to the crop, and the particular vulnerability of children whose bodies and brains are still developing.

We recognize that small-scale farming is an important part of Indonesia's agricultural sector, and that in some areas, children have participated in family farming for generations. Though it may take time to change attitudes and practices around children's role in tobacco farming, significant change is possible. In Brazil—the world's second-largest tobacco producer and a country, like Indonesia, where tobacco is cultivated largely on small family farms—Human Rights Watch found that a strict and clear government ban on child labor in tobacco farming, and comprehensive health and safety education and training, were helping to eliminate hazardous child labor in the crop. The Brazilian government had established meaningful penalties for child labor violations, applied both to farmers and the companies purchasing tobacco from them, and the penalties pushed people to end or limit their children's work on the farm. Indonesian authorities should take note of this approach.

As part of its efforts to eradicate the worst forms of child labor by 2022, the government of Indonesia should update its list of hazardous occupations for children, or enact a new law or regulation, to prohibit explicitly any work involving direct contact with tobacco in any form. There may be some light work on tobacco farms that is suitable for children, particularly in the early stages of tobacco production. For example, planting tobacco while wearing suitable gloves or watering tobacco plants with small, lightweight buckets or jugs could be acceptable tasks for children, as long as they were not working in extreme heat or dangerous conditions, and the work did not interfere with their schooling. However, Human Rights Watch believes that many aspects of tobacco farming in Indonesia constitute hazardous child labor under international standards, particularly most tasks involved in topping, harvesting, and curing tobacco, as there is no viable way to limit children's direct contact with tobacco during these stages of production.

The government should vigorously investigate and monitor child labor and other violations in small-scale agriculture,

including through unannounced inspections at the times and locations at which children are most likely to be working.

In addition, Indonesian authorities should take immediate steps to protect child tobacco workers from danger. The government should implement an extensive public education and training program in tobacco farming communities to promote awareness of the health risks to children of work in tobacco farming, particularly the risks of exposure to nicotine and pesticides.

All companies purchasing tobacco from Indonesia should adopt or revise global human rights policies prohibiting hazardous child labor anywhere in the supply chain, including any work in which children have direct contact with tobacco in any form. Companies should establish or strengthen human rights due diligence procedures with specific attention to eliminating hazardous child labor in all parts of the supply chain, and regularly and publicly report on their efforts to identify and address human rights problems in their supply chains in detail.



Indonesia is the world's fifth-largest tobacco producer, with more than 500,000 tobacco farms. Thousands of children, some as young as eight years old, work in hazardous conditions on these farms, exposed to nicotine, toxic pesticides, and other dangers. This work can have lasting consequences for their health and development.

Large Indonesian companies, as well as some of the largest multinational tobacco companies in the world, buy the vast majority of tobacco grown in Indonesia and use it to manufacture tobacco products sold domestically and abroad. None of these companies do enough to ensure children are not working in hazardous conditions on farms in their supply chains.

Based on interviews with more than 130 child workers, *"The Harvest is in My Blood"* documents how child tobacco workers suffer symptoms consistent with acute nicotine poisoning, handle toxic chemicals, cut themselves with sharp tools, faint while working in extreme heat, and face other dangers. Few of the children interviewed, or their parents, understood the health risks of the work or were trained on safety measures.

Children are particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of tobacco farming because their brains and bodies are still developing. Nicotine exposure during childhood has been associated with mood disorders, and problems with memory, attention, impulse control, and cognition later in life.

Human Rights Watch urges the Indonesian government and tobacco companies to ban children from work that involves direct contact with tobacco.

(above) Children tie tobacco leaves onto sticks to prepare them for curing in East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara.

(front cover) An 11-year-old girl ties tobacco leaves onto sticks to prepare them for curing in East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara.

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