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New International Cocoa Verification Board Formed – Launches Verification of African Cocoa Certification Effort

Industry, Governments, Nongovernmental Organizations, Unions and Academics Meet Formally for the First Time to Launch Transparent, Effective and Credible Verification Process

Amherst, MA – The much anticipated verification phase of the certification effort outlined in the Harkin-Engel Protocol was officially launched recently. The multi-stakeholder Verification Board convened by Verité in December 2007 met for the first time on January 15 and 16, 2008, in Brussels, Belgium. The newly created ‘International Cocoa Verification Board’ appointed Verité to act as the interim Secretariat for its inaugural year, subject to a possible one-year renewal.

Verité conveyed the feedback from the NGO Consultative Meeting in December, 2007, in Boston, Massachusetts, to the new Board. The views from the wider NGO community expressed during this conference helped to inform the agenda and discussion of the first ICVB meeting.

The multi-stakeholder approach used in composing the Board yielded a robust and productive dialog on the complex issues of remediation, scope and mandate for the verification effort, ICVB Board Member and verifier independence, compensation and transparency.

There was a lengthy and thoughtful discussion in Brussels regarding the scope of the current and future verification efforts. While an effort to evaluate the effectiveness of all remediation activities would be beyond the initial scope and mandate of the verifiers, there was a clear consensus that the verification effort should strive at all times to guide and strengthen remediation, including remediation implemented by governments, NGOs or the private sector. Any remediation activities mentioned in the National Survey Reports will be within the scope of the verification effort.

The Board unanimously agreed that the verifiers that they select must possess expertise in the cocoa sector in West Africa, child-sensitized interview techniques, social science research methodology and have irreproachable ethical standards to ensure that their work is of the highest quality. The Board envisioned that verifiers' reports will go beyond mere statistical analyses and will serve the following purposes:

- **Strengthened Remediation:** By more accurately assessing conditions on the ground and improving data collection techniques, verification will ensure that future remediation efforts are more effective, better targeted and more strategically implemented
- **Improved National Surveys:** By recommending methodological improvements to the Governments of Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire regarding their National Surveys, the verifiers will make recommendations that will help ensure that scale-up surveys are increasingly accurate and that research capacity at the national level is enhanced
- **Knowledge Transfer:** As verification will likely take place using multi-national teams, it is expected that the NGOs and academics involved in verification will find mutual benefit from each other's varied strengths and perspectives and that efforts should be made to strengthen the capacity of verification partners in these countries
- **Strengthen Ongoing Multi-Stakeholder Engagement:** By coming together to create a verification regime, this effort will provide an ongoing mechanism (that was heretofore non-existent) for all stakeholders to constructively engage in creating new mechanisms for improving the lives of West African cocoa farmers and children

The Board agreed to work with a high degree of transparency. Details regarding ICVB policies and procedures (Board member compensation rates, term limits, etc.) will be posted in the coming weeks on the new ICVB website (URL pending). There will be links to this site from the Verité and World Cocoa Foundation websites, among others.

While details of the nearly 50 agreements reached by the Board will be outlined in a forthcoming report and on the ICVB website, the following are highlights of some of the key decisions from the meeting:

- The ICVB budget will be pre-paid annually by industry to ensure independence of the verification process. The ICVB will review other funding sources for year two and onward
- All Board functions and verifiers' reports will be available publicly
- The Board agreed to decision making by consensus
- Three Sub-Committees were formed: Communications, Technical, and Budget and Finance
- All Board members are to be compensated equally to encourage diversity of representation, but members have the option to decline, donate or accept their compensation
- Legal structures for the ICVB are under review by Verité and outside counsel
- Verification will be carried out in phases – Phase One will verify data and methodology and Phase Two will consider ways to better link verification to remediation and to report on remediation activities

A Third Party Feedback mechanism is being created by the ICVB to ensure that there is a permanent mechanism for the global stakeholder community to share their perspectives throughout the verification effort.

Next Steps: The ICVB will issue a request for proposals from interested verifier organizations on February 8th. Interested parties should contact Alexa Roscoe at aroscoe@verite.org with proposals or to be added to the ICVB mailing list. The ICVB will select the final verifier(s) during their next meeting on April 3 and 4, 2008.

About the ICVB

The International Cocoa Verification Board was formed by Verité in December, 2007. This multi-stakeholder body includes 9 representatives from NGOs, academia, trade unions and industry. The nine Board members are: Anthony Fofie, Ghana Cocoa Board; Amouan Assouan Acquah, Special Counselor to the Prime Minister (Côte d'Ivoire); Stephen Ayidiya, University of Ghana–Legon; Andrews Addoquaye Tagoe, General Agricultural Workers' Union (Ghana); Alice Koiho Kipre, Afrique Secours et Assistance (Cote d'Ivoire); Diane Mull, International Initiative on Exploitive Child Labor (USA); John Trew, CARE International (USA); Jeff Morgan, Mars, Inc. (USA); and Isabelle Adam, European Cocoa Association (Belgium).

About Verité

Verité is a US-based nonprofit and award-winning pioneer in the social auditing, training, research and consulting field. The organization has over a decade of experience working with Fortune 500 corporations and their local suppliers through our global network of NGO partners. Verité works in over 60 countries to empower companies, factories, NGOs, governments, and workers to create sustainable workplace practices in the factories and communities where our consumer goods are made. Verité is a recipient of the Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship. For more information on Verité, visit <http://www.verite.org>.