

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES TRADE REPRESENTATIVE

Initiation of Section 301 Investigations of Acts, Policies, and Practices of Various Economies Related to the Failure to Impose and Effectively Enforce a Prohibition on the Importation of Goods Produced with Forced Labor

AGENCY: Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR).

ACTION: Notice of initiation, request for comments and notice of public hearings.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Trade Representative (Trade Representative) is initiating investigations with respect to acts, policies, and practices of the economies listed in Annex A of this notice related to the failure to impose and effectively enforce a prohibition on the importation of goods produced with forced labor. USTR is seeking public comments in connection with these investigations and will hold public hearings.

DATES:

March 12, 2026: The Trade Representative initiated the investigation.

April 15, 2026: To be assured of consideration, submit written comments and any requests to appear at the hearing, along with a summary of the testimony, by this date.

April 28: The Section 301 Committee will convene public hearings in the main hearing room of the U.S. International Trade Commission, 500 E Street SW, Washington, DC 20436, beginning at 10:00 a.m., continuing, as necessary, until May 1.

Seven days after the last day of the public hearings: Submit post-hearing rebuttal comments.

ADDRESSES: Submit documents in response to this notice, including written comments, rebuttal comments, and requests to appear through USTR’s electronic portal: <https://comments.ustr.gov/s/>. The docket number for written comments and rebuttal comments is USTR–2026–0133. The docket number for requests to appear is USTR–2026–0134.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For procedural questions concerning comments or participating in the public hearing, contact the USTR Section 301 support line at (202) 395-5725. For all other questions regarding this notice, please contact Megan Grimball, Co-Chair of the Section 301 Committee, or Associate General Counsel Benjamin Allen.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

I. Background

For almost 100 years, U.S. law has prohibited the importation of goods mined, produced, or manufactured in whole or in part with forced labor. This prohibition recognizes not only the humanitarian concerns associated with allowing parties to profit from the suffering of others but also foreign policy and national security concerns arising from the exploitation of workers. Such exploitation threatens domestic producers who must compete with foreign goods produced with an artificial cost advantage and may harm U.S. workers and citizens through distorting competition and the purchase of goods produced under exploitative conditions. Ending forced labor is a key priority and an economic and national security imperative for the United States.

Forced labor may be understood as work or service extracted from a person under the menace of any penalty for its nonperformance and for which the worker does not offer

himself voluntarily. In addition to U.S. constitutional and statutory prohibitions against forced labor, it is universally recognized under international law that forced labor is a practice that should not be tolerated. For instance, the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) holds that “[n]o one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.” Further, the International Labour Organization (ILO) *Abolition of Forced Labour Convention*, 1957 (No. 105) has achieved near universal ratification. Similarly, the nearly universally ratified *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1976) provides that “[n]o one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour.” Finally, the ILO *Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up* (1998), as amended in 2022, includes the “elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour” among its fundamental rights.

However, despite this clear and longstanding consensus, the use of forced labor across the world continues to persist and has even increased in recent years. The ILO estimates that as of 2021, 3.5 out of every 1,000 people, or 28 million people, globally are in forced labor. Moreover, it estimates that between 2016 and 2021, the number of people in forced labor increased by 2.7 million. According to the ILO, this increase was driven entirely by forced labor in the private economy.

Firms using forced labor incur artificially lower labor costs, and, as a result, are able to sell their goods at a lower price than they would otherwise. The ILO estimates that in 2024 the profits from forced labor in the global private economy amounted to roughly \$63.9 billion annually, with annual profits per victim of \$2,113 in the agriculture sector and \$4,994 in the industry sector, the highest among sectors in the private economy.

Forced labor taints the entire supply chain in which it exists. For example, the U.S. Department of Labor's 2024 *List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor (TVPRA List)* includes 134 products produced with forced labor in particular countries. The *TVPRA List* includes 34 downstream goods in particular countries that are produced with inputs that are produced with forced labor. These inputs made with forced labor include cotton used to produce garments, textiles, thread and yarn; critical minerals used to produce solar products or auto-parts; fish used to produce fish oil and fish meal; and palm fruit used to produce kernel or palm oil used in various cooking oils and biofuels.

The United States has led the way to prevent trade in goods produced using forced labor, which are readily available in global supply chains. For example, at present, U.S. Customs and Border Protection has issued 54 withhold release orders and eight findings with respect to various goods whose entry into the United States is prohibited under the U.S. forced labor import prohibition. This data likely understates the number of goods produced using forced labor globally, as research on forced labor can be particularly challenging.

The United States has consistently engaged with trading partners to prevent trade in goods produced with forced labor. In response to this engagement, Canada, Mexico, and the European Union have adopted measures intended to stop the importation or sale of products produced using forced labor. More recently, in the context of ongoing U.S. reciprocal trade agreement negotiations, several countries have committed to adopt such measures. However, none of these countries has adopted and effectively enforced a forced labor import prohibition to date. Although a majority of countries prohibit forced labor as a matter of law within their jurisdiction, such prohibitions are insufficient to

prevent firms from profiting from forced labor. In the absence of a forced labor import prohibition that is effectively enforced, firms can continue to source, use, and profit from imported products produced with forced labor, even if the use of forced labor is prohibited domestically.

The failure to prevent trade in products produced with forced labor may negatively affect U.S. commerce. In markets without forced labor import prohibitions, U.S. exports are required to compete with products produced wholly or in part with forced labor, including products that have been denied entry to the U.S. market and subsequently re-exported. The conditions of competition may skew to favor artificially low-cost imports produced by forced labor or incorporating forced labor inputs. Companies that do not use or rely on imports produced with forced labor may lose sales or revenues or even be pushed out of the marketplace.

II. Initiation of Section 301 Investigation

Section 302(b)(1)(A) of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended (Trade Act), authorizes the Trade Representative to initiate an investigation to determine whether an act, policy, or practice of a foreign country is actionable under Section 301 of the Trade Act.

Actionable matters under Section 301 include acts, policies, and practices of a foreign country that are unreasonable or discriminatory and burden or restrict U.S. commerce. An act, policy, or practice is unreasonable if it, while not necessarily in violation of, or inconsistent with, the international legal rights of the United States, is otherwise unfair and inequitable. In addition, Section 301(d)(3)(B)(iii)(III) specifies that an act, policy, or practice is unreasonable if it constitutes a persistent pattern of conduct that permits any form of forced or compulsory labor.

On March 12, 2026, the Trade Representative initiated Section 301 investigations to examine whether the failure of the various economies listed in Annex A to prohibit the importation of goods produced wholly or in part with forced labor is unreasonable or discriminatory and burdens or restricts U.S. commerce. Pursuant to Section 302(b)(1)(B) of the Trade Act, USTR has consulted with appropriate advisory committees and the inter-agency Section 301 Committee. Pursuant to Section 303(a) of the Trade Act, USTR is requesting consultations with the governments of the economies under investigation. Pursuant to Section 304 of the Trade Act, USTR will determine whether the acts, policies, or practices under investigation are actionable under Section 301. If any determination is affirmative, the Trade Representative must determine whether action is appropriate, and if so, what action to take.

III. Request for Public Comments

You may submit written comments on any issue covered by these investigations. In particular, USTR invites comments regarding:

- Whether any economy subject to these investigations maintains or is in the process of establishing a forced labor import prohibition, and whether any such import prohibition is being effectively enforced.
- The extent to which the failure of any economy to establish and effectively enforce a forced labor import prohibition is unreasonable, discriminates against U.S. goods, or constitutes a persistent pattern of conduct that permits any form of forced or compulsory labor.
- The extent to which the failure of any economy to establish and effectively enforce a forced labor import prohibition has negatively affected U.S. commerce,

such as through lost U.S. exports or economic output, lower prices for U.S. goods, or lower wages for U.S. workers.

- What action, if any, should be taken to address these issues, including:
 - The level and scope, if any, of duties on products of any economy subject to these investigations.
 - The level and scope, if any, of import restrictions on products of any economy subject to these investigations.
- The appropriate aggregate level of trade to be covered by any additional duties on products of any economy subject to these investigations.

IV. Hearing Participation

The Section 301 Committee will convene public hearings on April 28, 2026, in the main hearing room of the U.S. International Trade Commission, 500 E Street SW, Washington, DC 20436, beginning at 10:00 a.m. The hearings may continue, as necessary, until May 1. To testify at the hearings, you must submit a request to appear using the electronic portal at <https://comments.ustr.gov/s/>, following the instructions in Part V below. Requests to appear must include a summary of testimony, and may be accompanied by a prehearing submission. Remarks at the hearings are limited to five minutes to allow for possible questions from the Section 301 Committee. All submissions must be in English. To be assured of consideration, USTR must receive your request to appear and summary of the testimony by April 15, 2026.

V. Submissions Instructions

Interested persons must submit written comments, requests to appear at the hearing, summaries of testimony, and post-hearing rebuttal comments using the appropriate docket on the portal at <https://comments.ustr.gov/s/>. To make a submission, use the

docket on the portal entitled ‘Request for Comments on the Section 301 Investigation of Acts, Policies, and Practices of Various Economies Related to the Failure to Impose and Effectively Enforce a Prohibition on the Importation of Goods Produced with Forced Labor,’ docket number USTR–2026–0133.

Interested persons wishing to provide testimony at the hearing must submit a notification of intent and summary of testimony using the docket entitled ‘Request to Appear at the Hearing on the Section 301 Investigations of Acts, Policies, and Practices of Various Economies Related to the Failure to Impose and Effectively Enforce a Prohibition on the Importation of Goods Produced with Forced Labor,’ docket number USTR– 2026–0134.

You do not need to establish an account to submit comments or a notification of intent to testify. The first screen allows you to enter identification and contact information. Third party organizations such as law firms, trade associations, or customs brokers should identify the full legal name of the organization they represent and identify the primary point of contact for the submission. Information fields are optional. However, USTR may not consider your comment or request if insufficient information is provided.

Fields with a gray Business Confidential Information (BCI) notation are for BCI information that will not be made publicly available. Fields with a green (Public) notation will be viewable by the public.

After entering the identification and contact information, you can complete the remainder of the comment, or any portion of it, by clicking ‘Next.’ You may upload documents at the end of the form and indicate whether USTR should treat the documents as business confidential or public information. Any page containing BCI must be clearly

marked 'BUSINESS CONFIDENTIAL' on the top of that page and the submission should clearly indicate, via brackets, highlighting, or other means, the specific information that is BCI. If you request business confidential treatment, you must certify in writing that the information would not customarily be released to the public. Parties uploading attachments containing BCI also must submit a public version of their comments. If these procedures are not sufficient to protect BCI or otherwise protect business interests, please contact the USTR Section 301 support line at 202.395.5725 to discuss whether alternative arrangements are possible.

USTR will post attachments uploaded to the docket for public inspection, except for properly designated BCI. You can view submissions on USTR's electronic portal at <https://comments.ustr.gov/s/>.

Jennifer Thornton,

General Counsel,

Office of the United States Trade Representative.

ANNEX A

Economies subject to these investigations:

1. Algeria
2. Angola
3. Argentina
4. Australia
5. The Bahamas
6. Bahrain

7. Bangladesh
8. Brazil
9. Cambodia
10. Canada
11. Chile
12. China, People's Republic of
13. Colombia
14. Costa Rica
15. Dominican Republic
16. Ecuador
17. Egypt
18. El Salvador
19. European Union
20. Guatemala
21. Guyana
22. Honduras
23. Hong Kong, China
24. India
25. Indonesia
26. Iraq
27. Israel
28. Japan
29. Jordan

30. Kazakhstan
31. Kuwait
32. Libya
33. Malaysia
34. Mexico
35. Morocco
36. New Zealand
37. Nicaragua
38. Nigeria
39. Norway
40. Oman
41. Pakistan
42. Peru
43. Philippines
44. Qatar
45. Russia
46. Saudi Arabia
47. Singapore
48. South Africa
49. South Korea
50. Sri Lanka
51. Switzerland
52. Taiwan

53. Thailand
54. Trinidad and Tobago
55. Türkiye
56. United Arab Emirates
57. United Kingdom
58. Uruguay
59. Venezuela
60. Vietnam