

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1502

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

January 24, 2006

Jack McGuire
Interim President and CEO
American Red Cross
2025 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Mr. McGuire:

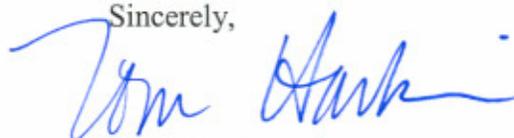
I am writing regarding the most recent Public Service Announcement (PSA) from the American Red Cross. In the monologue "Charlie" mentions that his jeans are made by using child labor and then writes a letter to the company asking them to "reconsider their labor practices." Then the spot goes on to show that "Charlie" becomes frustrated that his efforts "to save the world" are fruitless. In the end, the PSA implies that Charlie's attempts to stop child labor will, indirectly, eradicate a rain forest, kill off indigenous tribes, and impede cancer research, a baseless charge that is wholly unsupported by any objective evidence. A tag line fades in noting that "Saving the world isn't easy. Saving a life is. Just one pint of blood can save up to three lives. Give blood."

I am outraged at the suggestion in your PSA that somehow advocating the end of child labor hurts kids. As a long-time advocate for the eradication of child labor, I have seen first hand the debilitating effects this scourge has not only on its victim, but the child's family and society. At least 352 million child laborers between the ages of five and 17 are at work worldwide. At least 120 million of these children are involved in full-time work that is hazardous and exploitative. Most never see the inside of a classroom. These defenseless children often work under slave-like conditions that pose grave risks to their safety as well as their social, emotional and moral well-being.

The Congressional Charter of the American Red Cross notes that one of the corporation's purposes is to "carry out a system of national and international relief in time of peace, and to apply that system in mitigating the suffering caused by pestilence, famine, fire, floods, and other great national calamities, and to devise and carry out measures for preventing those calamities." I believe that it is inappropriate for an organization chartered by Congress with the goal of alleviating human suffering to attempt to accomplish its Congressional mission by denigrating the work of other worthy charities. Groups that have been organizing to end the scourge of child labor have made great strides in recent years, including reforms in the soccer ball manufacturing and chocolate industries to name just two.

I do believe that donating blood is important. I do not think, however, that because you give blood you cannot also help rid the world of the scourge of child labor or help with other humanitarian causes. These two forms of advocacy should not be mutually exclusive. I, therefore, strongly urge you to retract this PSA. I do not think this is the type of message you want to convey in a public service announcement that is focused on contributing to the greater good.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom Harkin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Tom Harkin
United States Senator