Contact: Robert Crumley

Tel. 202.828.6006 ext. 140

Email: crumley@afop.org

**For Immediate Release**

**Leading US Tobacco Company Could Reduce Domestic Child Labor**

*Changes in purchasing practice raises child labor standard for US tobacco growers*

November 5, 2014 Washington, D.C. — Leading United States tobacco company Philip Morris International announced today that it will begin buying domestically grown tobacco exclusively through third-party leaf supply companies, rather than directly from tobacco farmers. This change will require the world’s largest tobacco leaf suppliers to implement Philip Morris International’s detailed child labor policy on all U.S. farms from which they purchase tobacco. Philip Morris International’s new purchasing model will require more tobacco companies to ban children under 18 from performing some of the most hazardous tasks, such as pulling the tops off tobacco plants, harvesting, working at heights to dry leafs, handling pesticides, or working with sharp tools.

Through its *Children in the Fields Campaign*, the Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs (AFOP) has long sought to equalize protections under the law for children in employed in agriculture, and in tobacco production, in particular. Existing U.S. law and regulations do not limit work by children in tobacco farming, despite the hazardous nature of tobacco work. Children as young as 12 can be hired for unlimited hours, outside of school hours, on a farm of any size with parental permission, and there is no minimum age for children to work on small farms. At 16, child farmworkers can do jobs deemed hazardous by the United States Department of Labor. Children in all other sectors must be 18 to do hazardous work.

“AFOP welcomes Philip Morris International’s actions today to address the inadequacies in US child labor laws,” said AFOP Executive Director Daniel Sheehan.  “In changing how it purchases it U.S.-grown leaf, the company will help prevent many children from working in the nation’s tobacco fields, but continue to leave thousands of child workers unprotected. The Obama Administration and Congress must enact stronger safeguards to ensure these all child workers are protected from the dangers of tobacco work.”

“Philip Morris International’s new purchasing model means thousands of US tobacco farms will now need to meet higher child labor standards that should protect children from the most dangerous work in tobacco farming,” said [Margaret Wurth](http://www.hrw.org/bios/margaret-wurth), children’s rights researcher at Human Rights Watch. “Philip Morris International should carefully monitor suppliers to ensure they know the rules and follow them.”

“While we are changing our approach to buying tobacco in the U.S., PMI’s commitment to improving farm labor conditions on the farms from which we source tobacco has not changed. We require our suppliers to adhere to our practices, principles and standards, including our leading Agricultural Labor Practices (ALP) program…. With these new U.S. supply agreements, even more U.S. tobacco growers will come under PMI’s ALP standards,” said Nicolas Denis, Vice-President Leaf, PMI.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates over 218 million children around the globe, 126 million engaged in hazardous work, between the ages of 5 and 17 are involved in work that is inappropriate for their age. Using federal data, AFOP estimates as many as 500,000 of those children are currently working in U.S. farm fields.

*The Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs (AFOP) Children in the Fields Campaign strives to improve the quality of life of migrant and seasonal farmworker children by advocating for enhanced educational opportunities and the elimination of discriminatory federal child labor laws in agriculture. For additional comment or an interview with an AFOP expert, please contact Robert Crumley, AFOP Director of Communications, at (202) 828-6006 x140 or* [*crumley@afop.org*](mailto:crumley@afop.org)*, or Norma Flores, Director of the AFOP Children in the Fields Campaign at (202) 828-6000 x106 or* [*flores@afop.org*](mailto:flores@afop.org)*.*

*###*