

Dear Markéta,

How are you? How is school going this year? And tell me about London. You haven't been back home to Frýdek for ages. All the family would love to see you. I know you are in the middle of your exams – fingers crossed – and I hope that once they are over you will come home for a while. Maybe you'll fly back (I still can't get used to you living so far away). I haven't written to you for a long time, and as I am your sister I decided to remedy that now. I had a very interesting experience – something that got me thinking. And I wanted to tell you all about it.

It all began last Tuesday. I really wanted to eat some chocolate and I came across the bar you gave me not so long ago. There was nothing unusual about it apart from the fact it was not made in the Czech Republic. You reassured me that there was nothing special about it. But you did tell me something about this chocolate and, as a rule, I listen to what you say – but, sorry, this time I didn't think it was very interesting and I didn't pay any attention. At the time I didn't get what you were telling me. But then I looked at the wrapper to see if there was any information on it. I was surprised to see some words in English which meant something like: "Do your bit – Buy free-trade goods". I thought it was a bit weird to find that slogan on some chocolate. But that was all I could find out, apart from the ingredients and the country of origin: Zambia. By then I was hungry for information rather than chocolate so I left the bar to one side and went on to the Internet to satisfy my curiosity.

To my great surprise I found an Internet page on the same subject in Czech – it was a translation from English, which made it easier for me. I started reading and before long I had learned all kinds of interesting stuff. The chocolate I had just been eating was no ordinary chocolate. The Zambian producer who made it received enough money to give him and his family a decent living. It didn't seem that strange, but then I read that lots of people all over Africa – including children – work in inhuman conditions and their wages are really low. Hardly anyone earns a decent wage. This fact grabbed my attention – I was happy to find out that there are organizations that look after people, buying up their produce and selling it in Europe at a higher price and making sure the workers get a proper wage for their hard work. I tried to imagine how those people live. They work really hard all day long and yet they are paid so little that they are still hungry. I can't imagine how hard it must be for them. Then I thought about it and told myself that most people here just don't appreciate the good working conditions that we have in our country.

I read another interesting story on the Internet. It was about a family in Kenya living in a hut that was falling apart. The father used to work and so did six of his seven children. The youngest was seven years old. They worked from morning to night and yet they hardly earned enough to eat. The children were undernourished. They worked on cocoa plantations, and their lives were turned around once they joined the international fair-trade market. Their new employer introduced far better working conditions, and thanks to him the family's lives got much, much better. Only the father and the eldest son had to work. With their earnings they could not only repair their home but they could also afford to pay for the other children to go to school. Living in those conditions is really unusual. These children got the chance to build a better future.

I don't know if you find this story gripping – in any case, I did. I am happy to know that better working conditions can lead to a much better life. Yet I am sad to know that so few people have that chance. I think that in Europe the situation is not so critical. But in Africa, for example, it is really obvious that just improving working conditions gives people's lives a new meaning.

Thank you for buying me that chocolate. It was not just any bar of chocolate. I learned lots of interesting things from it. I was so happy to know that there are people in this world who help others with their fair trade. That way people's living conditions are made better. It is only right that people's lives can be improved by improving their working conditions.

I am sure that you must have already known what I have said in my letter – otherwise, why would you have bought me that chocolate? But I felt I needed to tell someone about it and you were the right person.

I hope to see you soon. Call me when you get a moment!

Dominika

Ben/Pro