

ITGLWF Press Releases 2009

December

Union Action Needed to Protect Migrant Workers in the Fashion Industry

On the occasion of International Migrants Day, the Global Union representing workers in the clothing and footwear sectors has called on unions to step up their efforts to protect the rights of migrant workers employed in the industry.

Says Patrick Itschert, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation: "The abuse of migrant workers, including trafficked migrant labour, is a growing problem in the fashion industry, with workers often paying labour brokers a hefty fee – sometimes as much as ten years' local minimum wage - in order to secure a job in Jordan, Malaysia, Mauritius or elsewhere.

"The fees often take the form of a loan which must then be repaid, with interest, from future earnings. Passports are withheld as security against the loan, and sometimes workers are charged additional fees if they want to change workplaces. They are typically housed in overcrowded dormitories and survive on substandard food.

"With deductions being made for their loans as well as for housing and food, workers are forced to work extremely long hours. Is it any wonder then many of these young migrant workers suffer from inadequate sleep and health disorders, including malnutrition. Without identity documents, owing money to brokers, tied to fixed contracts and far from home these workers are in reality bonded slaves.

"Today trafficked migrant workers are among those most badly affected by the economic crisis. Losing their jobs leaves them unable to pay off their debts, and they are sometimes left stranded, unable to return home, when the factories where they worked suddenly close down.

"Migrant garment workers are not found only in Amman, Kuala Lumpur or Port Louis. They are just as likely to be found in the backstreets of Barcelona, Manchester or Buenos Aires, where ruthless employers strive to undercut producers in low-wage countries.

"Earlier this year a Manchester sweatshop producing for high street brands was exposed for its exploitation of workers. The factory employed mostly illegal immigrants from Pakistan and Afghanistan who were earning a little more than half the minimum wage and working twelve hours a day, seven days a week. The factory was housed in an old Victorian mill and working conditions inside were more reminiscent of 1909 than 2009.

"Though some accuse migrant workers of taking local jobs and driving down wages, the reality is that they generally take jobs that no one else is available or willing to take. In Romania, for instance, wages in the industry are so low that local workers have abandoned the industry which now relies on an influx of migrant labour from China or Bangladesh.

"With many brands and retailers turning a blind eye to abuses in their supply chain, the goods made by these workers find their way to every high street and shopping mall in Europe and North America.

“Trade unions in developing and industrialised countries alike need to do more to address this appalling exploitation. They need to map the nature and scale of the problem. They need to recruit migrant workers into union membership, make them aware of their rights and ensure they enjoy equality in wages, conditions of work, rights and opportunities. They need to exert pressure on governments, employers and buyers for action to eliminate abuses. And they need to raise awareness among consumers that there is no such thing as cheap fashion because someone somewhere always pays the price”.

ITGLWF 10th WORLD CONGRESS ENDS IN FRANKFURT

The ITGLWF 10th World Congress, which ended in Frankfurt on Friday, adopted a number of major decisions to guide the work of the International over the coming period.

The Congress, held under the motto “organise = decent work = decent life”, met from 2 to 4 December 2009 and brought together 214 delegates from 97 organisations in 68 countries.

Congress paid tribute to the tremendous work carried out over the past twenty-one years by [Neil Kearney](#), the late General Secretary who died of a heart attack in Bangladesh just two weeks before the start of Congress.

Congress confirmed the appointment of a new General Secretary, Patrick Itschert. Patrick takes over at the international level after nearly two decades as Secretary of the European regional organisation, ETUC:TCL, a post which he continues to hold.

Congress unanimously elected as President [Hisanobu Shimada](#), General Secretary of the one million-strong UI Zensen of Japan. It also placed on record its appreciation of the work of Manfred Schallmeyer of IG Metall, who served as President for the past five years and whose organisation, IG Metall, graciously hosted the Congress at its headquarters in Frankfurt.

Congress elected fifteen [Vice-Presidents](#), eight of whom are women, and formally approved the membership of the Executive Committee. The EC brings together representatives of countries with a combined membership of at least 3,000 paid-up members, including Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bosnia Herzegovina, Chad, Congo, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, Finland, Germany, Italy, India, Ivory Coast, Netherlands, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Senegal, Serbia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka,

Sweden, Togo, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States. Leif Hakansson of IF Metall of Sweden and Erich Bach of IG Metall of Germany were appointed as auditors.

One of the major issues on the agenda of the Congress was the future of the ITGLWF, with interventions from Jyrki Raina, General Secretary of the International Metal Workers' Federation and from Manfred Warda, General Secretary of the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions.

Congress noted that corporate restructuring has blurred the boundaries between different manufacturing sectors. It recognised the need for a powerful trade union force across manufacturing, capable of propelling the industry back to a central role within economies and providing a more powerful counterpart to transnational companies, while providing the best possible representation and services to members. It resolved that the ITGLWF should make all necessary efforts to ensure that the creation of a new global union federation for manufacturing is concluded no later than 2011. The new organisation should be structured to include democratic and representative mechanisms ensuring a voice for all trade union members in all sectors of manufacturing, including textiles, clothing, leather and footwear.

Congress adopted an Agenda for Action highlighting the priority issues for the ITGLWF in the coming period in relation to the core activities of organising, improving the representation of workers, and involving members in the democratic life of their unions. Delegates discussed and agreed a number of motions relating to these three key areas of action.

Other major issues on the agenda included the economic recession, which has put in jeopardy the future of 20 million workers in the textile, garment and shoe industries. Delegates discussed the trade union action that is needed to address the crisis and called for an end to unregulated globalisation and for a recovery strategy that puts decent work at the heart of the global economy.

Attention was also devoted to the issue of women at work and in trade unions, and motions were adopted calling for measures to ensure full gender equality and to increase and sustain women's representation in unions.

In addition to devoting attention to the many problems facing workers in the sector, Congress heard organising success stories from different parts of the world, including Turkey, Cambodia and Cambodia, where a combination of trade union action and pressure from brands and retailers has resulted in the reinstatement of unfairly dismissed trade union leaders, the resolution of conflicts, and the introduction of mature industrial relations.

The Proceedings of Congress will be circulated in due course. For more information visit the ITGLWF website.

November

Neil Kearney: An extraordinary man, an extraordinary life

The tragic death of Neil Kearney, aged 59, has robbed the international trade union movement of a truly inspirational leader.

Neil died the way he lived. He had completed a day-long series of engagements with trade unions, company managers and government officials in Bangladesh aimed at secured respect for labour rights in the sector when he suffered a fatal heart attack in the early hours

of Thursday morning. It is a measure of what he meant to the workers in Bangladesh that three days of mourning have been declared in the sector.

Neil served over 20 years as the General Secretary of the Brussels-based International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation. He was a brilliant and passionate defender of the rights of those workers worldwide who fall prey to the worst excesses of the international outsourcing of garment and footwear production.

Born in 1950 in Donegal, Ireland, Neil moved to the UK at the age of 17 in search of work and took a job in banking. He joined a union on his first day at work. In 1972 he joined the then National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers where he served as Head of the Information and Research Department for sixteen years. He was active in politics during that period, running for parliament twice in 1974 and four years later being elected Councillor in the London borough of Kensington and Chelsea where he became the leader of the opposition. He was a lifelong socialist who resigned from the Labour Party over the Iraq war.

He married his wife Jutta in 1978 and had two daughters, aged 25 and 18 of whom he was very proud. When at home he loved nothing more than to get into the kitchen, roll up his sleeves and cook for his family.

Neil was elected General Secretary at the ITGLWF's 6th World Congress which will be held in Frankfurt in early December.

In his capacity as General Secretary of the ITGLWF, Neil embodied the qualities of a true world leader – a consummate professional setting the highest standards for his own organisation and expecting the same in every workplace for which the ITGLWF had jurisdiction. As conditions worsened in the sector he became even more resolved to put the world to rights, repeatedly visiting over 140 countries worldwide to work with unions and help negotiate improvements in working conditions. He was absolutely convinced both of the ability of an individual to change the world for the better and of the need for individuals to pull together in the collective.

He will be remembered by ITGLWF members as a fighter who was tireless in his defence of trade union rights and who made it seem like anything was possible. He was fierce when dealing with exploitation and injustice, masterful in negotiations, and a true gentleman on a personal level. "With Neil's death we lose an excellent General Secretary, a loyal colleague and a good friend", says ITGLWF President Manfred Schallmeyer.

He was known for his unerring ability to cut to the heart of the most complex of issues, always putting the interests of workers front and centre. Despite the pressures he faced and the scope of the problems he tackled, his sense of humour enabled him to keep things in perspective and to break down barriers.

He had an amazingly detailed knowledge of the industry and of international labour standards as well as a keen appreciation of the limits and possibilities of corporate social responsibility. He played an active role on a number of multi-stakeholder initiatives and served as a board member of the UK Ethical Trading Initiative and formerly the US based Social Accountability International and was an active proponent of the MFA Forum. He worked closely with brands, retailers and manufacturers in an effort to secure sound industrial relations in the sector, making a profound impact on many of the company representatives he came into contact with.

It is perhaps fitting that the last place where Neil drew breath on this earth was Bangladesh, a country he visited over fifty times since 1988. Particularly memorable was his work to

ensure that workers whose lives were devastated by the Spectrum factory collapse received adequate compensation and medical assistance. One moment he would be engaged in discussions with top government and industry officials or planning action with union leaders, the next he would be carrying a paralysed worker in his arms into a better-equipped hospital or travelling miles on a horse and cart to visit an injured worker in his village. For Neil, it was all in a day's work.

The work on the garment factory disaster brought the ITGLWF into contact with the Spanish retailer Inditex, with whom the ITGLWF signed an international framework agreement in 2007. Neil was in Bangladesh with Inditex at the time of his death.

The ITGLWF has been inundated with messages of condolences from all sides, for he touched thousands and will be remembered for generations to come.

The thoughts of the ITGLWF and its members are with Neil's family.

October

“World’s Dirtiest Cotton”: Uzbekistan Must Clean up or Face Demise of Industry

Uzbekistan is today producing the world's dirtiest cotton and if the Uzbek government does not take urgent action to rid the industry of forced labour and forced child labour in the cultivation and picking of the fibre it will be frozen out of world markets. This was the message today delivered to the Uzbek President Islam Karimov by the Global Union Federation for Textile, Garment and Leather Workers, the ITGLWF.

The Global Union claims that in spite of promises by the Uzbek government to eliminate forced labour and forced child labour, and in spite of major leading brands having banned the use of Uzbek cotton in their products, forced labour and child labour is even more rampant and abusive during the 2009 harvest.

The ITGLWF is urging the Government of Uzbekistan to ensure that there is an immediate cessation of forcing children and adults to work in the cotton fields and to invite the ILO or a mixed commission to observe the harvest season and provide assurance on implementation of international labour standards.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the ITGLWF “The need for action is highlighted by the fact that this year’s harvest is particularly brutal, with children and adults being forced to work in the fields from 8am to 6pm, seven days a week, without transport, shelter, security, food or even safe drinking water.”

“Children are required to harvest between thirty kilos and sixty kilos of cotton a day. When they cannot meet these targets they are given three choices: buy cotton from farmers, bring cotton from home or pay bribes!”

“Children are beaten and put under huge psychological pressure when they fail to reach their targets, with adults reportedly inciting other children to bully those who fall behind. Last year such pressure led a fifteen year old girl to commit suicide after she failed to reach her target.”

“Not only is the Uzbek government forcing children to harvest cotton, adults are also being forced to work in the fields against their will. This year mosque communities, state enterprises, the armed forces and law makers are all being conscripted to work in the fields. In some areas highways are being blocked in a bid to force residents to participate in the cotton harvest.”

“There has been a huge growth in corruption as teachers, parents and others are forced to pay bribes to avoid conscription into forced labour gangs.”

“Families who protest are subject to harassment and intimidation. Criminal proceedings have even been launched against families who protested against their children being taken out of school to work in the fields.”

In some areas, such as the Syrdarya Region, local officials have announced that only students aged 14 and over will be required to pick cotton. “However”, says Kearney, “The use of forced labour, child or adult, is never permissible. In addition to this the ILO classifies the picking of cotton as a Worst Form of Child Labour and international labour standards require that nobody under the age of 18 should ever be involved in such work.”

The situation may deteriorate further. “Near the end of October the size of the cotton harvest will be easier to predict, and in the past this is when some regions which were behind their targets were offered incentives to get more workers into the fields. This is when forced child labour is most likely to be used” warns Kearney.

In protest at the use of forced use of child labour during the cotton harvest many international garment brands and retailers have banned the use of Uzbek cotton by their suppliers. “In order to reverse this trend the Uzbek Government must take immediate steps to ensure that not a single child or adult will be forced to harvest cotton. Failure to take action” says Kearney “is likely to lead to the demise of the Uzbek cotton industry”.

WDWD: Ensure Decent Work by Paying a Living wage, Demands Sri Lankan Union

An example of trade union action on the World Day for Decent Work comes from the Free Trade Zones & General Services Employees Union in Sri Lanka, where FTZ workers earning the minimum wage live in poverty, often barely able to afford one meal a day.

As part of its on-going campaign for a living wage, on October 7 the ITGLWF affiliate organised a demonstration in front of the main gate of the Katunayake FTZ. The workers maintained the action for an hour in spite of attempts by police to break up the picket.

The FTZGSEU is exerting pressure both on employers and on the Board of Investment which governs the zones to increase wages during the 2009 salary review which is now underway.

The WDWD action reflects the union's approach of raising awareness among workers, getting them involved and organising at factory level as key ways of securing a living wage.

The FTZGSEU is supported in its campaign by the ITGLWF, which selected the living wage issue as the theme for its WDDW activities.

US Government Urged to Take Stronger Action against Honduras

The Global Union representing workers in the garment and footwear industry has urged US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to take the strongest possible action against Honduras, including reviewing its trade links with the country, in order to force the defacto government to resolve the crisis and allow the return of President Zelaya.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the Brussels-based International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation: "Three and a half months after the coup, there appears to be no progress on returning President Zelaya to power. Fourteen opponents of the coup have been murdered and a clampdown on civil liberties has resulted in mass arbitrary arrests, the physical abuse of journalists, the closure of independent media outlets and severe limitations on the right of assembly.

"Demonstrators who took to the streets after President Zelaya returned to Honduras in September were beaten by police and several hundred were detained in unauthorised detention centres. Many were reported to be held in soccer stadiums, evoking Chile in 1973. Amnesty International has reported that detainees openly opposing the defacto government have been subjected to ill-treatment.

"Two media outlets, Radio Globo and the Canal 36 TV station have been closed since 28 September. The order was verbally revoked on 5 October but Honduran security forces continue to hold their equipment, and both remain closed.

"The curfew imposed following President Zelaya's return has now been lifted but an emergency decree still allows the army and police to break up protests. The trade union movement has been living under a state of siege, prevented from holding public meetings of more than five people.

"An example of the impossibility of maintaining decent work in an undemocratic and unlawful state occurred late last month when workers in the garment export industry in San Pedro Sula were forced to work for two days without pay to make up for the days lost during the 48-hour curfew. With the trade union movement unable to operate freely and the Ministry of Labour remaining silent, the majority of workers, who earn wages below subsistence level, had no choice but to work for no pay.

"The situation in Honduras is totally unacceptable and the US government must take the strongest possible action in order to force a resolution to the crisis", concluded Mr. Kearney.

Global Union Calls for Action from Brands and Retailers on Living Wage

On the occasion of the World Day for Decent Work, the Global Union representing workers in the textile, clothing and leather sector is asking leading brands and retailers in the sector what action they are taking to ensure that the workers who produce their goods earn a living wage.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation: "Over the past decade most brands and retailers have introduced codes of conduct governing the conditions under which the items they market are made. Many codes now provide for the payment of a living wage, yet almost nowhere is this happening.

"Instead, most brands and retailers continue to source from manufacturers that pay starvation wages, force workers to work extremely long hours just to make ends meet and deny workers the right to organise and bargain collectively to improve their wages and conditions.

"The United Nations defines poverty as living on less than US\$ 2 a day. Yet across Asia and Africa millions of workers in full-time employment earn less than this. In Bangladesh the legal minimum wage is only US\$ 25 – less than US\$ 1 a day. The United Nations defines this as absolute poverty.

"The situation has worsened in the current economic crisis as many retailers appear to be demanding concessions from their suppliers in the form of price cuts, thus leading employers to demand wage cuts from their workforce. In addition, the drop in overtime has left many workers unable to make ends meet on their starvation wages.

"This is unacceptable. Brands and retailers must make the payment of a living wage a contractual requirement and must take this obligation into account in their price negotiations with suppliers. They must require that suppliers disclose details of wage costs, including the unit labour costs and assumptions about production targets.

"And because the best way of improving wages is through negotiations between unions and employers, they must ensure that workers have the right to organise and bargain collectively and that mature systems of industrial relations are in place allowing for regular dialogue and consultation on all issues affecting workers, including piece rates and targets.

"In reality, given that wages represent such a minimal proportion of production and retail costs, paying a living wage in low-wage producing countries would add only a few cents to the retail price of the garment, so brands and retailers have no excuse not to take action.

"On the contrary, securing the payment of a living wage for a standard working week is more important than ever as a key stimulus to relieve recessionary pressures, stimulate consumption and drive recovery. Many economists now recognise that producing countries can not get back to full production through exports alone, and that increased wages are an important factor in boosting domestic consumption.

WDDW: A Living Wage is a Key Component of Decent Work

On the World Day for Decent Work, the Global Union representing workers in the textile, clothing and footwear industry has renewed its demand for the payment of a living wage for all workers in the sector.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation: "We launched our 'bargaining for a living wage' campaign on last year's World Day for Decent Work. Since then, the impact of the economic crisis on our sectors of industry has made efforts to defend and increase wages more vital than ever, which is why we are maintaining the same theme.

“The campaign is aimed at ensuring that workers worldwide have the right to organise and bargain collectively in order to secure a living wage, and that the prices paid by brands and retailers permit the payment of a living wage to the workers who produce their goods.

“In an industry where the minimum wage was already far from meeting the needs of workers and their families, the situation has worsened dramatically as many leading retailers appear to be wrangling concessions from their suppliers in the form of price cuts, thus leading employers to demand wage cuts from their workforce. In addition, the drop in overtime has left many workers unable to make ends meet on their starvation wages.

“In reality, securing the payment of a living wage for a standard working week has become more important than ever as a key stimulus to relieve recessionary pressures, stimulate consumption and drive recovery. Many economists now recognise that producing countries can not get back to full production through exports alone, and that increased wages are an important factor in boosting domestic consumption.

“On October 7, unions around the world will be mobilising in a variety of different ways to highlight the global struggle for decent work in the context of the global economic crisis. In our sector, we are calling on unions to intensify their activities in support of a living wage, including working to determine a living wage, garnering support for the living wage figure, using the living wage as an organising issue, and including the living wage figure in pay negotiations with employers and governments”.

Peruvian Apparel Company Accused of Inhuman Treatment

A Peruvian company that used lie-detector tests to grill workers about strike action and rob them of their rights has been slammed for its anti-worker behaviour.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation: ‘The behaviour of Texpop S.A. is beyond the pale. Two years ago the company used abusive lie-detector testing to illegally dismiss workers. The company continues to violate worker rights, including imposing twelve-hour workdays, misusing the clocking-in cards to push down wages, ignoring the provisions of the collective agreement, unfairly dismissing workers who protest at poor conditions, and failing to pay severance and social benefits to dismissed workers.

“One worker was taken to an office on the other side of the city where she was wired up to a polygraph machine and grilled about what she knew concerning a possible strike over seniority pay. After hours of questioning she was told she had failed the test and was fired. At seven o'clock at night, in an unfamiliar part of the city, in the dark and with no money on her, she was left to make her own way home.

“Another former worker, Enrique Rosales, who had worked for fourteen years in the company, was told two years ago that in order to keep his job he too would have to take a lie-detector test. Three weeks later he was told the results suggested he had not been totally honest in one of his responses, and that under its rules the company could not continue to employ him. However, the company claimed that because the issue was a minor one, it was prepared to make an exception and allow him to work on a contract basis, meaning he would lose his rights as an employee, including bonuses, paid holidays, seniority pay, social security and the right to severance. When he refused he was fired”.

The ITGLWF has urged the company to meet with the workplace union and the national textile workers Federation FNTTP to find urgent solutions to the problems faced by workers and has warned that unless a rapid solution is found, approaches will be made to the

multinationals sourcing from the company, including Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger, Polo Ralph Lauren, Gap Inc, BCBG, North Face and Hollister.

Say no to more rights for “Private Labour Offices” in Turkey

Four days before the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund officials meet with the Turkish Government, Global Unions met with Turkey’s Minister for Labour, and lent their support to President Abdullah Gül’s veto of a bill giving “Private Labour Offices” broad rights to place temporary workers in enterprises and warned of the dangers that precarious employment poses for society.

Representatives of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine, and General Workers’ Unions (ICEM), the International Textile, Garment, and Leather Workers’ Federation (ITGLWF), and the International Metalworkers’ Federation (IMF) reported to the Labour Minister that contract and agency labour and precarious forms of employment have been exploding around the world, bringing with it two categories of workers: one with good secure jobs and another category of workers faced with short term jobs, low wages, no social protection and a loss of rights.

At a press conference in Istanbul today, Manfred Warda, ICEM General Secretary, said, “Globally, the massive shift away from regular employment into temporary work or jobs through agencies and labour brokers is having a deep impact on all workers, their families, and on society. Erosion of the employee-employer relationship, often the basis of labour law, is leading directly to a growing number of violations of workers’ rights.”

“There is a connection between international ‘policy changes’, those inspired by the international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which have encouraged work flexibility and brought with it a lowering of work conditions at national levels,” added Warda. “Such changes reflect clear employer strategies to weaken collective bargaining through part-time and agency work, and the ICEM will resist this in every way possible.”

Guy Ryder, ITUC General Secretary, reiterated today a message delivered by the global unions to the G-20 Summit last week, stating “The expansion of precarious forms of work and deregulation of the labour market are not the answer to the employment crisis – in fact, the insecurity of working people over recent decades was a significant contributor to the recession. It is no coincidence that precarious work and fragile financial markets have both been developing in recent decades.”

“The way forward must be based on sustainable, not precarious development - a sustainable economy where the financial sector is at the service of the real economy. We need social justice and environmental sustainability to reverse the damage done to our planet in a way that provides good, steady and secure jobs,” added Ryder.

Neil Kearney, ITGLWF General Secretary said, "Agency hires and temporary contracts destroy job security and undermine all other rights and promote gross exploitation of both the temporary worker and the permanent employee working alongside them."

“In Turkey, ITGLWF affiliate Teksif is locked in battle with Edirne Giyim where workers employed on an agency type arrangement with inferior wages and conditions are being used to reduce and eventually eliminate a permanent workforce of long standing. Union resistance to the worsening conditions has resulted in mass firings of union members,” Kearney added.

“Elsewhere in Turkey, ITGLWF affiliates are in daily conflict with textile, clothing and leather industry employers using every means, including sub-contracting, undeclared labour and short-term contracts to prevent unionisation and the protection of workers' rights. Government action is urgently needed to restore worker protection against this onslaught,” demanded Kearney.

Jyrki Raina, IMF General Secretary, said “Permanent jobs are being eroded by an increasing reliance by employers on labour hire via employment agencies. In some plants we are now finding that more than fifty per cent of the workforce are agency workers.”

“The financial crisis has delivered a further blow to precarious workers. Hundreds of thousands of them have been the first to lose their jobs, because dismissing workers with no rights to severance pay or notice periods is a cheap and easy way for employers to reduce their workforces. The crisis has had significant and far reaching impacts on employment,” he added.

“Here in Turkey, IMF affiliate Birlesik Metal Is has been supporting 350 workers who were dismissed last year by Sinter Metal for exercising their right to join a trade union. The company alleges that the dismissals were a necessary response to the financial crisis, but the evidence shows that this is no more than a weak excuse to dismiss union members and prevent workers from protecting their jobs,” he said.

Over the next week, metal worker unions around the world will be mobilizing against precarious work and will be joining with other national and sector unions around the globe in a World Day for Decent Work on Wednesday 7 October.

The ICEM will focus World Day for Decent Work activities on its Contract and Agency Labour campaign in Thailand and Turkey.

“A sustainable recovery will not be built on precarious and substandard jobs. That’s why around the world today, unions and their members are united in their demand for secure jobs and equal rights for all workers, “ said Jyrki Raina.

The ITUC represents 170 million workers in 157 countries and territories and has 312 national affiliates; the ICEM represents 467 trade unions in 132 countries; . the ITGLWF is the global voice for 217 trade unions in 110 countries; and the IMF covers over 200 trade unions in 100 countries.

Unethical Fashion Brands Should be Held Criminally Accountable for the Damage they Cause

Speaking at the University of Pavia in Italy at the launch of the audio version of *Glockers* by Silvana Cappuccio, Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation said that fashion comes at a huge cost to those who produce the goods, resulting in insecurity, harsh treatment, long working hours, low pay and abuse.

Said Mr. Kearney: "Millions of workers in the fashion industry have become little more than slaves. Most are women and most are young, some very young. Armies of children, some as young as four years old, work long hours often only for a meager ration of food. Many, in countries like India, have been bought for a few Euros from their parents or have been kidnapped and then trafficked into slavery far from home.

"A recent survey in India suggests that a quarter of all garment factories are employing under-age labour. Most of the production is for export to Europe. Shame on those fashion houses, fashion brands and fashion retailers who drive this slavery. And shame on those consumers who buy these products without questioning how they were made and how they can be sold so cheaply when so much labour is involved.

"Recent research in Bangladesh shows the incidence of tuberculosis among garment workers is double that of the population as a whole. No wonder when large numbers work in humid, overcrowded conditions for long hours and with little food. TB is inevitable with this lethal cocktail of exhaustion, malnutrition and unsanitary conditions. Again, the brands and retailers who continue to source garments from such an environment must bear much of the blame for the damage they cause these workers, their families and communities.

"In efforts to drive down wages even further, workers are increasingly being shipped from one country to another to turn out garments for export. Italian manufacturers have closed their factories in Italy and shifted production to Romania where wages are a quarter of those here. But, Romanian workers unsatisfied with such low wages and the way they have been treated have moved west in search of better paid work, often as cleaners and domestics leaving the local textile, garment and shoe industries short of labour. No problem! A ready solution is at hand. Import workers from China, Bangladesh or Nepal and pay them even less.

"And to exploit these workers even more they are forced to pay recruitment fees, travel costs and handling charges. Often the payments are greater than the wages earned meaning that many of these workers will never be free of debt. So, modern day slavery on our doorstep! Again, shame on those who profit from this inhumanity to man".

Concluded Mr. Kearney: "We surely have to ask if fashion is really worth so much suffering. And we also have to ask whether those who place orders in such hell-holes should not be subject to prosecution and imprisonment here in Europe for aiding and abetting this cruel exploitation and destruction of young lives".

September

COMMENTS

NEIL KEARNEY, GENERAL SECRETARY, INTERNATIONAL TEXTILE, GARMENT AND LEATHER WORKERS' FEDERATION

25 September, 2009

Unregulated globalisation in the textile, clothing and leather sector has destroyed jobs in traditional manufacturing areas and transported them to other corners of the world free from legal restraint where insecurity, harsh treatment, long working hours, low pay, and abuse are the norm.

Millions of workers in these sectors - the fashion industry - have become little more than slaves. Most are women and most are young, some very young. All are spinning and weaving, bleaching and dyeing, cutting and stitching, pressing and packing fashion items primarily for brands and retailers in North America, Europe and Japan. Today production is carried out in as many as 160 countries in every corner of the world. Most of this is for export and much involves some of the grossest exploitation of the workers concerned.

Armies of children, some as young as four years old, work long hours often only for a meager ration of food. Many, in countries like India have been bought for a few Euros from their parents or have been kidnapped and then trafficked into slavery far from home. They help in textile mills, they glue shoes, and they embroider garments. Sometimes the sweatshops they work in are so ill-lighted and dark they lose their eyesight. They are beaten when they cry for their mothers, when they make mistakes or when they fall asleep from exhaustion. In Pakistan it is estimated that half of such children are dead before the age of twelve!

Some months ago in India I witnessed such children hard at work meeting the demand for the latest fashion craze – hand embroidery. One boy told me he had worked eight days on the embroidery on one garment being paid only 50 cents for all that work. Another explained how his friend had been hung upside down from a fan in the ceiling when he had asked for time off for a family funeral.

We surely have to ask if fashion is really worth so much suffering. And we also have to ask whether those who place orders in such hell-holes should not be subject to prosecution and imprisonment here in Europe, including in Italy, for aiding and abetting this cruel exploitation and destruction of young lives.

A recent survey in India suggests that a quarter of all garment factories are employing under-age labour. Most of the production is for export to Europe including Italy. Shame on those fashion houses, fashion brands and fashion retailers who drive this slavery. And shame on those consumers who buy these products without questioning how they were made and how they can be sold so cheaply when so much labour is involved.

In the past ten years working conditions in the industry have actually worsened. Real wages have fallen over the period by 25% while working hours have increased by the same amount. Working conditions have worsened. Recent research in Bangladesh shows the incidence of tuberculosis among garment workers is double that of the population as a whole. No wonder when large numbers work in humid, overcrowded conditions for long hours and with little food. TB is inevitable with this lethal cocktail of exhaustion, malnutrition and unsanitary conditions. Again, the brands and retailers who continue to source garments from such an environment must bear much of the blame for the damage they cause these workers, their families and communities.

In efforts to drive down wages even further workers are increasingly being shipped from one country to another to turn out garments for export. Italian manufacturers have closed their factories in Italy and shifted production to Romania where wages are a quarter of those here. But, Romanian workers unsatisfied with such low wages and the way they have been treated have moved west in search of better paid work, often as cleaners and domestics

leaving the local textile, garment and shoe industries short of labour. No problem! A ready solution is at hand. Import workers from China, Bangladesh or Nepal and pay them even less.

And to exploit these workers even more they are forced to pay recruitment fees, travel costs and handling charges. Not having the money to pay immediately, these sums are commuted into loans to be paid back on a monthly basis. Often the payments are greater than the wages earned meaning that many of these workers will never be free of debt. And to make sure they continue working and don't abscond they are forced to surrender their passports and other identity documents to the employer or the labour broker. Without such documentation they can go nowhere, in reality, becoming bonded labourers existing on the whim of the employer. So, modern day slavery on our doorstep! Again, shame on those who profit from this inhumanity to man.

The latest scam to hit the industry is the use of short-term contracts. Workers are employed on contracts lasting no more than three months, often only a month and in some cases on a weekly or daily basis. Such workers have no job security. Existing on the whim of the employer they are forced to keep silent on the pain of losing their jobs. They cannot complain, they cannot rest, they cannot even think of joining a trade union. In reality, they are denied all rights. Some work for years in this way. They are the underbelly of the fashion industry.

Such contracts are now rife in Turkey, in Indonesia, in India and in Peru. All these countries are producing and exporting textiles, garments and shoes to Europe including Italy. Again, it is the brands and retailers who profit most from this extortion.

And the bigger the brand the bigger the profit! A few weeks ago a newspaper featured one well known Italian brand name marketing handbags costing up to Euros 15,000 each. Many similar handbags are manufactured in southern China where workers earn about Euros 80 a month. It is a sobering thought that a Chinese worker would have to work some 16 years just to be able to buy one such handbag!

The current global recession threatens to make conditions even worse. Since June last year nearly 13,000 production units in the sector have closed, nearly 13 million jobs have been lost and a further 3 to 4 million jobs are under threat. Buyers have been cutting the prices paid to suppliers by as much as 30%. And while the factory owners continue to drive the biggest cars and live luxury lifestyles workers have not been so lucky having to take huge wage cuts and work longer hours.

Bangladeshi owners have been whinging about not being able to pay their workers and have withheld bonus payments, but, one high profile company boss recently boasted he had earned Euros 4 million from his two garment factories last year.

In Peru, last month, I found factory bosses earning sixty times the wages of their highest paid employees!

Over the past decade many brands and retailers concerned at damage to their image from such cruel working conditions have set about cleaning up their supply chains. Some have been more committed or more successful than others. Most have adopted codes of conduct for their suppliers demanding that certain minimum labour standards be maintained in the supplier factories. In the main they have relied on a system of social auditing to try to ensure compliance. The results are mixed.

Most social auditors appear unqualified, lack knowledge of factory conditions and are unmotivated or downright lazy. Their attention is focused on visible issues such as the existence of fire extinguishers while the less visible including underpaid wages or overtime is simply overlooked. Recent figures from India suggest that as many as 60% of garment factories are not paying the legal minimum wage. Yet this has apparently gone undetected by the armies of auditors that today swarm over workplaces. Or worse, they have simply ignored this illegality opting for a quiet life.

The corporate social responsibility industry with social auditing at its heart is now a Euro 48 billion earner. But, looking at conditions in factories it looks like most of this has been wasted resulting, at best, in minor surface level improvements. Real change is going to require moving beyond codes of conduct and social auditing and ensuring that constant monitoring of factory conditions is undertaken through a mature system of industrial relations where representatives of management and workers engage in social dialogue and negotiation on wages, working hours and workplace conditions. Such a mechanism is much more likely to deliver improvements than the failed legions of social auditors.

But, mature industrial relations are dependent on workers being able to join together in trade unions and elect their representatives to engage in negotiation and bargaining with their employer. This will require stronger labour legislation better enforced by governments, a commitment from employers to share the benefits of production and a newly energized trade union movement willing and capable to engage fully on behalf of their members and aggressively to build membership, hone their representation skills and actively involve all their members in the democratic life of the union.

Finally, all of us as consumers must pay greater attention to the conditions of manufacture of the items we purchase, insist on guarantees that production conditions complied with international requirements and refuse to buy any fashion item where that guarantee is not forthcoming.

Industrial GUFs, ITGLWF, ICEM, IMF, Demand Jobs Focus from This Week's G20 Meeting

Three Global Union Federations (GUFs), representing 55 million industrial workers, call on G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors meeting in Pittsburgh, USA, this week to prioritise the global jobs crisis in their deliberations, and to create real measures that stop the epidemic of job losses throughout the world.

The GUFs, the International Textile, Garment, and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF), the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine, and General Workers' Unions (ICEM), and the International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF), stress the immediate need for economic ministers to recognise that true recovery can only happen if job retention and job creation become the priorities.

The three workers' federations join to state that the full ripple effect of the year-old crisis is only now being felt as tens of millions of jobs are cut, with a forecast of more job losses to occur in 2010 and 2011. The ITGLWF, ICEM, and IMF stand staunchly behind the International Trade Union Confederation's (ITUC) statement last week that "any talk of recovery has little meaning until people are getting back to work."

The federations call attention to the "Pittsburgh Declaration," a statement by the ITUC, the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) to the OECD, and all GUFs that demands a changed mindset by international financial institutions regarding jobs, human and trade union rights, and more stringent financial governance and market regulation.

The declaration, found here, calls on the G20 to implement the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Jobs Pact, developed in June 2009, as well as adding the ILO's Decent Work Agenda to the G20's Charter for Sustainable Economic Activity. Such adoption would effectively incorporate workers' rights, social protections, and meaningful social dialogue between business, labour, and government to economic and social decision making.

The "Pittsburgh Declaration" also calls for the G20 to prioritise the creation of green jobs and protecting workers who are unfairly affected by actions related to climate change.

Stated Neil Kearney, General Secretary of ITGLWF, "For workers in textiles, where nearly 13 million jobs have been lost in the past year, the global crisis is deepening, not bottoming out. Stimulus packages must be continued and extended to promote sustainable manufacturing that provides decent work and a living wage, leading to a consumer-demand recovery."

ICEM General Secretary Manfred Warda added, "Talk of recovery now is not only premature, but inhumane in view of unemployment rates rising into double digits in many countries. A new social model must take hold, starting with this G20 meeting, and it must begin with serious reforms to the neoliberal financial model, as well as a sustainable social plan that addresses the needs of millions of people that have been negatively impacted by this crisis."

"What has occurred thus far," said IMF General Secretary Jyrki Raina, "is that huge sums have been poured into financial institutions, while these same institutions have failed to manage their fundamental task – to finance a viable industrial economy. We demand that governments address the critical issue of employment, particularly the human adversity brought on by precarious labour, a form of work that undermines the industrial structures of the global north and destroys equitable development opportunities in the south."

The G20 meeting in Pittsburgh is scheduled for 24-25 September. The ITGLWF is the global voice for 217 trade unions in 110 countries; the ICEM represents 467 trade unions in 132 countries; and the IMF covers over 200 trade unions in 100 countries.

"No Medals for Exploitation and Starvation Wages at 2010 World Cup', says Global Union

The Global Union representing workers in the garment industry has called on FIFA and its local organising committee to take steps to ensure that branded apparel for the 2010 World Cup is not made in sweatshops.

"Next year, as millions tune in to watch this major event, the logos of FIFA and the sportswear brands will be everywhere - on soccer shirts, on advertising hoardings and on balls" said Steve Grinter, Education Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation.

"But who will be thinking of the conditions of the workers who laboured to make the shirts or stitch the footballs or build the stands ?"

Speaking in Johannesburg at a Stakeholder Conference on Decent Work in World Cup 2010 convened in August by the Building and Woodworkers' International, Mr. Grinter said the major issues for sportsgoods' workers are the lack of respect for freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively, insecurity of employment caused by industry restructuring, abuse of short-term labour contracting and other forms of precarious employment, as well as poverty wages.

“In South Africa the clothing workers’ union SACTWU has reached an agreement with the local organising committee which guarantees that all producers of Fifa-branded sportswear in the country must comply with the collective bargaining agreement for the industry, and all producers must be members of the clothing industry bargaining council”, said Mr. Grinter.

“But how can South African producers compete with overseas suppliers who pay poverty wages and violate basic trade union rights?.

“In order to ensure a level-playing field, FIFA and the brands must cooperate to improve wages and working conditions in the global sportswear industry. They must disclose their production locations so that working conditions can be monitored. They must require that all their suppliers guarantee the right of workers to organise for the purposes of bargaining collectively. And they must implement a living wage throughout their supply chains and be prepared to pay higher prices where required to enable wages to be increased to the living wage”.

“These same demands are at the heart of the PlayFair campaign, organised by a broad alliance including the ITGLWF, the International Trade Union Confederation and the Clean Clothes Campaign to promote the rights of sportswear workers producing for the Olympics”, noted Mr. Grinter.

“Let’s make 2010 a World Cup to be remembered as the event that set the standard for fair play both on and off the football field!”, he concluded.

Indian Government Urged to Crack down on Child Traffickers

Following the recent release of 94 trafficked bonded child labourers in India, the Global Union representing workers in the garment industry has called on the government to bring the traffickers to justice and to sentence them to long prison terms for perpetuating slavery.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the Brussels-based International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers’ Federation: “The children, aged between 7 and 14 years old, were trafficked from Bihar, India’s poorest state, with a promise of a better future.

“Some future! The children were pressed into labour doing zari embroidery work and making decorative forehead bindis. At the time of their release they had been working sixteen hours a day for months on end without receiving any wages.

“The children were found to be working, eating and sleeping in cramped, poorly-lit and poorly-ventilated rooms in the scorching heat. Most of them were covered in blisters and allergic rashes as a result of their appalling living and working conditions.

“They were released in August in a raid carried out by the anti-child labour network Bachpan Bachao Andolan, in collaboration with the police and government officials. The raid was the first rescue operation following a landmark judgment of the Delhi High Court making it easier for the authorities to pursue such cases and making employers accountable under the Penal Code.

“The children will now be entitled to a rehabilitation package amounting to 400 US\$ as well as enrolment in special schools for former child workers”.

In his letter Neil Kearney urged Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to renew government efforts to eliminate child labour and in particular to take every step to eradicate trafficking.

Silicosis Risk Lurks for Returned Migrant Denim Workers, Governments Warned

Migrant workers formerly employed in Turkey's textile and garment industry may have contracted silicosis from sandblasting denim in factories that lacked basic protective measures, warns the Global Union for the textile and clothing industry.

In a joint letter, the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation and the Solidarity Committee of Sandblasting Laborers have urged the governments of Azerbaijan, Moldova, Georgia and Romania to take measures to protect returned workers who may be at risk.

Says ITGLWF General Secretary Neil Kearney: "The process of sandblasting, in which fabric is blasted with sand in order to give it a worn look, exposes workers to the risk of inhaling dust and thus developing silicosis. The most fatal and irreversible form of silicosis can occur after only a few months of exposure. In the European Union this type of production has been banned for more than 40 years because it represents a major health risk.

"In Turkey sandblasting was widely used from the nineties onwards but it was only in 2005 that the occupation became associated with silicosis. An estimated ten thousand workers in the country are believed to have been exposed to risk in unsafe factories until the process was banned earlier this year.

"To date 550 workers have been diagnosed with silicosis, and 40 have died. However, with an incidence rate estimated at almost fifty percent among workers in the sector the actual number affected could be ten times greater.

"Research has now revealed that many migrant workers from nearby countries were employed – often illegally – alongside Turkish workers and may also be affected by the disease.

The governments of Azerbaijan, Moldova, Georgia and Romania have been made aware of the findings of the Solidarity Committee of Sandblasting Laborers and have been urged to ensure that citizens who worked as sandblasters in Turkey from 1990 onwards, regardless of their legal status, are made aware of the fact that they are at risk of developing silicosis and are encouraged to be tested immediately.

August

July

Lesotho Could Face Disaster if Garment Industry Lifeline Damaged

"Competing in the global garment industry is not easy when you are a small, under-resourced African nation with huge economic, social and health problems, and while it is important to acknowledge the problems exist in Lesotho's apparel industry it is also important to recognize the improvements that have been made and the contribution to this

progress by the government, local trade unions and the brands and retailers who source there”.

So says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers’ Federation, speaking in Brussels on allegations of serious breaches of labour and environmental standards in Lesotho’s apparel industry due to be published in the UK’s Sunday Times this weekend.

“While we are committed to demanding the highest possible labour and environmental standards, we fear that this story may damage efforts to stabilise and grow the country’s garment industry”, says Mr. Kearney.

“The ITGLWF has worked closely with local trade unions, key international buyers and retailers and the Government of Lesotho over a number of years to improve wages, working conditions and labour standards, to secure support for infrastructure development and to develop market openings, particularly in Europe, for Lesotho’s garment exports. We have done so because the garment sector is almost the sole source of manufacturing employment, providing the vast majority of the country’s foreign exchange earnings and providing a lifeline for a small, under-resourced nation with huge economic, social and health problems.

“Estimates suggest that more than one-third of the garment sector’s workforce is HIV-positive. In spite of this productivity and industrial efficiency is on par with the garment industry average.

“Lesotho is far from key markets and lacks direct access to ports and other transport facilities. Its ability to have secured and built a significant textile and garment industry is a tribute to the energy of its workforce, the involvement of government, the confidence of inward investors and the commitment of a handful of international buyers who have continued to source there in spite cost and accessibility restraints.

“The ITGLWF believes that sustainable development in Africa will only come when Africa’s natural resources are utilized in the continent itself instead of being exported in raw form at knock-down prices. Nowhere is this more clear than in the textile and garment sector where 97% of Africa’s cotton – some of the best in the world – is exported in raw form with the continent’s garment industry then having to import fabric at high cost making the industry highly uncompetitive.

“Lesotho is one of the few African countries where African cotton is now transformed on the continent – in the case of Lesotho, into denim fabric – which is then utilized in the production of jeans for export. The ITGLWF wants to see this develop both in Lesotho and elsewhere in Africa.

“However, the development of manufacturing capability must be on the basis of environmental protection and the provision of decent work for those employed.

Countries like Lesotho struggle to meet both environmental and labour standards. Weak infrastructure and regulatory institutions arising from lack of resources is a constant problem.

“But, efforts over the past five or six years involving the government of Lesotho, manufacturers, trade unions and the key international brands and retailers buying in Lesotho have been able to bring about considerable improvements in both environmental and social conditions.

“While there has been much improvement, much more needs to be done on both levels. This is clear from stories of environmental damage caused by inadequate handling of waste water and of waste disposal. Clearly, greater effort is needed particularly in the public provision of secure industrial waste disposal facilities. The European Union’s ‘Aid for Trade’ support for Africa should be utilized to effect further improvements.

“On the labour front there have been significant improvements in unionized factories. Precious Garments is a good example here where efforts have been made to develop mature systems of industrial relations where regular dialogue and negotiation between representatives of workers and management has replaced confrontation and conflict.

“While the industry still doesn’t pay a living wage to its workforce, earnings and working conditions in unionized factories are better than in many competitor nations.

“Un-unionized workplaces are still a problem but the ILO is due to launch a ‘Better Work’ programme in conjunction with the Government of Lesotho, employers and unions later this year which should effect considerable improvement.

“In 2004 there were real fears that Lesotho’s textile and garment industry would disappear and with disastrous local implications with the advent of trade liberalization in the sector on the ending of the Multi-Fibre Arrangement governing trade in textiles and clothing. Fortunately a handful of international brands and retailers including Gap Inc., Levi Strauss and Wal-Mart, stuck with their suppliers there in difficult circumstances which has maintained much needed jobs.

“So, while acknowledging that numerous problems exist in Lesotho’ textile and garment industry it is important to recognize the progress that has been made over the past five or six years and the contribution to this progress by the government of Lesotho, local trade unions and the brands and retailers who source there.

“The ITGLWF wants to see these improvements continue and intensify. But, this will be easier if there are greater market opportunities both in the United States and in the European Union. That’s why we have been working to encourage European buyers to consider Lesotho as a textile and garment source, supporting sustainable development in the African continent.

“We are concerned, however, that undue negative commentaries using easy targets and without recognizing the progress that has been made and the contribution of these easy targets to that progress may deter new buyers from exploring Lesotho as a reliable source of textile and garment production. Were this to happen it would do great damage to efforts to promote sustainable African development using textiles and clothing as the traditional engine of that development”.

Menderes Buyers’ Urged to Encourage Union Meeting

Brands sourcing from the Menderes textile factory in Turkey have been asked to persuade their supplier to meet with the labour union Teksif to resolve a long-standing industrial relations’ dispute at the plant.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers’ Federation (ITGLWF): “When workers at Menderes tried to unionise over a year ago, their efforts were met with harassment and dismissals.

“For over a year, the ITGLWF and its affiliate Teksif have been trying to arrange a meeting with Menderes in order to resolve these issues.

“On Monday, Tekisf formally requested to meet with Menderes for the purpose of dialogue and negotiation in normal industrial relations’ practice.

“Teksif, which was founded nearly sixty years ago, is the largest union active in the textile and garment sectors in the country and is party to collective agreements with some 150 separate employers.

“Teksif has reminded the company that the right of workers to freely organise without any intervention whatsoever is accepted to be a basic human rights. It has reiterated its desire to resolve the dispute through dialogue and has suggested that both sides meet as soon as possible to examine, in depth, the issues involved with a view to arriving at a rapid and mutually-acceptable solution”.

“The ITGLWF has asked the brands sourcing from Menderes to impress upon their the need to engage in good faith dialogue and bargaining with Teksif”.

Brands sourcing from Menderes include Ikea, Target, Wal-Mart, Mothercare, Carrefour, Kohls, and Sears.

Ikea Hacked ?

The Global Union representing workers in the textile sector has expressed concern that a hacker may have gained access to Ikea’s email system.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers’ Federation: “When we asked Ikea to encourage its Turkish supplier Menderes to meet with our affiliate Teksif in order to resolve an ongoing industrial relations’ dispute at the plant, the response we received was completely at odds with the company’s position as outlined publicly in IWAY, Ikea’s code of conduct.

“The email, from a person purporting to represent Ikea, claimed that the company did not interfere in the decisions of its suppliers and that Ikea’s experience with the union had been a negative one”.

“We have alerted Ikea CEO Anders Dahlvig to the fact the company’s communication systems may have been hacked”, said Mr. Kearney.

“If on the other hand this is a genuine response to a situation where workers have been dismissed for joining a union, then Ikea should urgently review its approach to corporate social responsibility and the application of fundamental worker rights in its supply chain”.

“If this is truly the position of Ikea, how can the company ensure social compliance if it claims not to interfere in the decisions of its suppliers ? And is it any wonder, given the tone of the response, that Ikea would find its experience of dealing with any reputable trade union organisation a negative one?”, queried Mr. Kearney.

Honduran Employers in Denial

The Global Union representing workers in the garment and footwear sector today criticised statements by Honduran employers claiming that all is well in the country.

The maquila employers' association, the Asociación Hondureña de la Maquila, recently issued a statement claiming that 'notwithstanding the political crisis that Honduras is experiencing' the country is functioning normally.

"Every such statement further incriminates those who make them and is a total denial of what is actually happening", says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the Brussels-based International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF).

"Civil and democratic liberties, including the right of freedom of association, are under attack, lethal force has been used against protesters, two leaders of the grassroots opposition to the coup have been murdered, over 1,300 trade union and civil rights' activists have been detained, and journalists have been harassed, detained or expelled.

"In the garment export industry, where employers have come out in favour of the coup, there have been reports of apparel workers forced by their employers to join rallies in support of the regime.

"All of this is reminiscent of the darkest days of dictatorships and leads one increasingly to the belief that since there is a total denial that abuses of human and worker rights are occurring the only way the matter can be dealt with is to totally isolate the country, including trade sanctions", concluded Mr. Kearney.

EU Urged to Suspend Honduras Trade Preferences

The European Union's Commissioner for Trade Catherine Ashton has been asked to suspend GSP+ preferences to Honduras until the country returns to democracy.

Honduras is one of sixteen countries granted duty-free access to the EU market under the European Union's special incentive arrangement for sustainable development and good governance, known as GSP+.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the Brussels-based International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation: "In order to be eligible for GSP+, countries must have ratified and effectively implemented 27 specified international conventions, including the UN's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the core Conventions of the ILO.

"The coup has put Honduras beyond the pale. Many fundamental rights have been suspended, unions are unable to carry out their activities in freedom and security, two leaders of the opposition to the coup have reportedly been murdered, and protesters and journalists have been attacked. There are also grave concerns about the impact of the coup on wages and working conditions.

Concludes Mr. Kearney: "In overthrowing democracy and curtailing civil and labour rights, the coup has put paid to Honduras' eligibility for GSP+. The European Union should therefore suspend its privileges until democracy and the rule of law is restored".

US Trade Associations Putting Profits before Human Rights in Honduras

The Global Union representing workers in the apparel and footwear sectors has dubbed as 'disgusting' a letter from leading US trade associations to President Obama calling for business as usual with Honduras following last week's coup which was supported by key elements of the country's business community.

Seven trade groups, including the American Apparel & Footwear Association, the Emergency Committee for American Trade, the National Council of Textile Organizations, the National Retail Federation, the Retail Industry Leaders Association, the Association of Importers of Textiles and Apparel and the US Chamber of Commerce, wrote to President Obama on July 11 urging him to secure the US's economic relationship with Honduras.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the Brussels-based International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation: "This approach, which overlooks democracy, civil liberties and the rule of law, is an affront to democracy and a negation of American values.

"Since the coup there has been growing concern at the threat to trade union and popular leaders, and it appears there is a list of leaders who are threatened with detention and whose personal safety is at risk. There have been reports that on Saturday evening, two leaders of the popular opposition to the coup, Roger Ivan Bados and Ramon Garcia, were murdered in two separate incidents by unidentified gunmen.

"There is also growing concern about worsening working conditions, and in particular at efforts to claw back a wage increase ordered by President Zelaya six months ago in order to reflect the increased cost of food and other essentials. In reality the increased wage barely covered 90% of basic food needs and less than a third of a living wage covering basic needs such as food, rent, transport, education, and medical care".

Concludes Mr. Kearney: "These trade associations are protecting their profits on the backs of murdered leaders and worsening wages and working conditions. The ITGLWF is calling on organisations linked with the AAFA and the six trade associations to publicly disassociate themselves from the statement.

'Smarten Up' , Turkish Knitwear Company Told

The latest example of how Turkish textile and clothing companies cynically use the country's retrograde labour laws to prevent workers from exercising their rights.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation: "Under Turkish laws, unions must meet a double threshold of representing 10% of workers in a sector and over 50% of workers in an enterprise.

"Last week, our affiliate Teksif signed up 215 of the 350 workers at Okiteks in the city of Orhangazi and applied to the Ministry of Labour for bargaining rights.

"Almost immediately the union cull began, and to date eighteen Teksif members have resigned from the union under threat of dismissal.

The ITGLWF has warned the manufacturer that it's behaviour is unacceptable and has asked it to put an end to its anti-union activities and to advise its workforce that it will respect national legislation and international labour standards on freedom of association.

The Global Union has warned that if the company failed to so, approaches will be made to its customers which include the UK giant Coats plc.

Brands Should Keep a Close Eye on Honduras, Says Global Union

The Global Union representing workers in the garment sector is asking brands sourcing from Honduras to reconsider whether the country is a suitable place to do business and to reject any attempts on the part of their Honduran suppliers to cut the wages they pay to workers.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the Brussels-based International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation: "In view of the impossibility of maintaining decent work in an undemocratic and unlawful state, it is difficult to see how brands can continue doing business in Honduras in the present circumstances, particularly given that employers appear to be strongly in favour of the coup.

"Unless there is a rapid return to democracy, reputable brands sourcing from Honduras should seriously reconsider the future of their orders in the country" he said.

"In the meantime, in view of the fact that one of the first steps taken by the de facto government has been to announce a revision of the 2009 minimum wage decreed by President Zelaya, brands should remain vigilant and advise their suppliers not to cut the wages they pay their workers.

"In December 2008, when negotiations in the tripartite wage commission broke down after employers rejected union pay demands, President Zelaya ordered an increase of up to 60% in the minimum wage (from 3,448 Lempiras up to 5,500 L in urban areas and 4,055 L in rural areas). The maquila sector was exempt from the decree and wages in the sector were negotiated separately.

"The increased wage covered less than 90% of basic food needs alone, which according to government estimates currently amount to 6,200 L for a family for a month.

The ITGLWF has asked brands and retailers to convey their concerns to their suppliers as well as to the Honduran employers' associations.

Korean Investor in Indonesia Urged to Clean up its Act

A Korean-owned apparel plant in Indonesia has been warned to clean up its act after thirty workers were fired for joining a union.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the Brussels-based International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF) "Earlier this year, workers at PT Busana Indah Global in West Java in Indonesia grew tired of working long hours for poverty wages and of being cheated on overtime and health insurance.

"In order to defend their rights they formed a plant union belonging to ITGLWF affiliate Garteks SBSI, but management terminated two union leaders and twenty-eight members through dismissals, forced resignations and the failure to renew short-term contracts.

"Workers who held a peaceful demonstration in protest at these violations found themselves face to face with a large police squad".

The ITGLWF has warned the parent company Hanil Synthetic Fiber Co. Ltd that such behaviour is unacceptable and has said that unless the company immediately reinstates the unfairly dismissed workers and begins a dialogue with the union it will ask the company's buyers to intervene to ensure their codes of conduct are respected.

June

Honduras Should Face Trade Sanctions Unless Democracy Is Restored, Says Global Union

Condemning the coup which has ousted Honduran President Manuel Zelaya, the Global Union representing workers in the textile, garment and footwear industries said today that unless democracy is restored and the military returns to barracks Honduras should be isolated and global sanctions should be imposed on the country.

Said Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF): "People should resolve their differences within the country through peaceful democratic dialogue, but in the absence of such an approach sanctions should be considered.

"It is particularly regrettable that some elements of the Honduran business community, including the export sector, appear to support the overthrow of democracy", said Mr. Kearney.

"This makes it all the more urgent that trade with Honduras be reviewed. With this in mind, the ITGLWF is calling on the UN and the OAS to consider the imposition of sanctions if democracy is not restored immediately.

Show Respect for Workers, Indonesian Footwear Company Told

The Global Union representing workers in the garment and footwear industries has intervened with the Indonesian footwear manufacturer PT Prima Inreksa Industries asking that it regularise the situation of workers laid off over two years ago.

The International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation made approaches to the company after the laid off workers, supported by their colleagues who are still employed, held a rally in Jakarta to demand the payment of their wages.

Says ITGLWF General Secretary Neil Kearney: "When Prima Inreksa Industries laid off 1,000 workers in March 2007 it promised to continue paying them 80 percent of their monthly wages. After the first month, however, the company reneged on its promise and in the following months it paid workers at most 30 percent of their wages and sometimes nothing at all".

The ITGLWF has asked the company to live up to its commitments it made and to ensure that workers receive their full legal entitlements. "PT Prima must show its workers some respect", said Mr. Kearney.

Warning that the behaviour of PT Prima is damaging the reputation of Indonesia as a reputable place in which to do business, the Global Union also asked Minister for Manpower Erman Suparno and the employers' association APINDO to intervene to ensure the workers' rights are upheld.

ILO Urged to Play Lead Role in Sustainable Apparel and Footwear Initiative

The ILO was today invited to play a leading role in a stabilisation and recovery initiative grounded in decent work which has been developed to lead the textile, clothing and footwear industries out of the current recession in which twelve million jobs have so far been lost and a further three million are at risk.

Speaking at the ILO Conference, Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation, said these workers were paying for the recklessness of greedy bankers and the excesses of unregulated globalisation and that action was needed to turn their suffering into gain for the industry and for its current and future workforce.

"Brands and buyers, manufacturers and trade unions, governments and international institutions and various civil society bodies, under the umbrella of the MFA Forum, have worked at breakneck speed as the crisis has unfolded to devise the Sustainable Apparel and Footwear Initiative" he said.

"The strategy has decent work as its mainstay and promotes the payment of a living wage as a key tool to stimulate domestic consumption.

"It promotes mechanisms to deliver urgent credit and finance, the absence of which is today strangling the industry. This is seen as a remarkable opportunity to support raising labour standards in the industry through instruments of financing.

"Short-term stabilisation efforts need to be accompanied by measures designed to ready the industry for recovery and to boost competitiveness. Maintaining employment is seen as key here with training and retraining cutting in to stave off redundancies, keeping workforces intact and using downtime to upskill to boost productivity.

"The final element of the strategy is aimed at those where survival isn't possible at the moment, providing for a responsible transition with displaced workers receiving their full legal entitlement to all outstanding wages, pensions and severance, access to jobs banks and retraining and underpinned by government-provided safety nets.

"The Sustainable Apparel and Footwear Initiative is, in reality, seeking a revolution in the sector using the recession to fashion a new model for the textile, clothing and footwear industry based on new global supply chains and new global consumption patterns", said Mr. Kearney.

"The broad framework outlined has been put together rapidly. The challenge is now to refine it and put it into operation, and in this the ILO is well placed to play a lead role.

"In the first instance trade unions want to see the ILO hosting an early round-table brainstorming bringing together the wide range of players needed to provide the oxygen for the initiative, including representatives from the entire textile, clothing and footwear supply chain - manufacturers and trade unions, brands and retailers, governments from both exporting and importing countries, and the financial institutions and the development agencies.

"This unprecedented range of interests would then work on how to share the tasks and would roll out the initiative in strategic textile, clothing and footwear producing countries and linked closely to the ILO's Better Work programme.

Concluded Mr. Kearney: "We welcome the commitment of the ILO in addressing the impact of the current economic crisis on employment and look to it to translate this strong political will into immediate action on the ground in the textile, clothing and footwear industry".

INTERNATIONAL TEXTILE, GARMENT AND LEATHER WORKERS' FEDERATION

**Speech by ITGLWF General Secretary Neil Kearney
International Labour Conference**

Geneva, 17 June 2009

As the global economic recession deepens workers, their families and communities are hurting. Particularly hard hit are those who have lost their jobs. There are now twelve million such workers in the textile, clothing and footwear industries - mainly women and often the family's sole breadwinner - laid off in the past year. At least another three million workers in the sector await the same fate.

These workers are paying for the recklessness of greedy bankers, lax labour law enforcement and unregulated globalisation. Their pain needs urgently to be turned into gain for the industry and for its current and future workforce.

With up to fifteen million unemployed or potentially unemployed the luxury of drawn out academic and theoretical assessments of the situation is not an option. Workers and their trade unions recognise that urgent remedial action is needed to deal with the immediate crisis and to chart a course for a sustainable future for the industry and those it employs.

That's why a broad section of shareholders and stakeholders in the industry, brands and buyers, manufacturers and trade unions, governments and international institutions and various civil society bodies, under the umbrella of the MFA Forum, have worked at breakneck speed, as the crisis has unfolded, to develop survival and recovery proposals with decent work as their mainstay.

Noting that economists foresee domestic consumption, particularly in Asia, as the best route to recovery, the Forum has devised a strategy grounded in decent work and promoting the payment of a living wage as a key tool.

The strategy, under the title "Sustainable Apparel and Footwear Initiative", demands that the sector secures access to some of the US\$3 trillion allocated by the G20 as counter recession stimuli packages. Corporates and trade unions recognise the urgent need to leverage trade finance, the absence of which is today strangling the industry. The Forum wants workers in the industry to benefit immediately from the Rapid Social Response Fund of the World Bank's Vulnerability Financing Facility with aid going to "good manufacturers" and with preferential access to credit and at preferential rates for businesses demonstrably providing decent work.

This is seen as a remarkable opportunity to support raising labour standards in the industry through instruments of financing.

Short-term stabilisation efforts need to be accompanied by measures designed to ready the industry for recovery and to boost competitiveness.

Maintaining employment is seen as key here with training and retraining cutting in to stave off redundancies, keeping workforces intact and using downtime to up skill to boost

productivity Funding derived from part of the stimuli packages and government involvement and support will be crucial in this preparation for recovery.

The final element of the strategy is aimed at those where survival isn't possible at the moment providing for a responsible transition with displaced workers receiving their full legal entitlement to all outstanding wages, pensions and severance, access to jobs banks and retraining and underpinned by government provided safety nets. The current crisis has clearly demonstrated the hardship caused by the absence of severance, unemployment and pension funds in many economies and the need for the urgent establishment of such provision.

Interestingly, the MFA Forum strategy recognises the fallacy of total reliance on exporting for growth and development. Given that consumption in US and European markets is likely to take some considerable time to reach pre-recession levels, the strategy places central importance on promoting economic development and stimulating consumer demand primarily in textile, clothing and footwear producing countries. Hence the emphasis on decent work incorporating the payment of a living wage to all workers in the sector.

Key players in the industry have already begun considering options for modifying their supply chain strategies in order to focus on a broader geographic distribution of consumption, the need for a more highly skilled labour force and innovations in environmental sustainability.

The Sustainable Apparel and Footwear Initiative is, in reality, seeking a revolution in the sector using the recession to fashion a new model for the textile, clothing and footwear industry based on new global supply chains and new global consumption patterns.

To succeed the strategy will require urgent input from a range of players, including the industry itself, the ILO, World Bank, UNDP and governments from North and South!

The ILO should be at the heart of honing this decent work centred stabilisation and recovery initiative for the textile, clothing and footwear sector. In the first instance trade unions want to see the ILO hosting an early round-table brainstorming bringing together the wide range of players needed to provide the oxygen for the initiative including representatives from the entire textile, clothing and footwear supply chain - manufacturers and trade unions, brands and retailers, governments from both exporting and importing countries, and the financial institutions and the development agencies.

This unprecedented range of interests would then work on how to share the tasks needed in developing the new model industry centred on decent work and paying a living wage to every employee. In co-ordination they would then roll out the initiative in strategic textile, clothing and footwear producing countries and linked closely to the ILO's Better Work programme.

The broad framework outlined has been put together rapidly. Our challenge is now to refine it and put it into operation. The International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation believes the ILO is well placed to play a lead role in this in fulfilment of its long-term responsibility for defending and promoting employment, decent work and sustainability.

We welcome the commitment of the ILO in addressing the impact of the current economic crisis on employment and look to it to translate this strong political will into immediate action on the ground in the textile, clothing and footwear industry.

Outlaw Tainted 'White Gold'

Global clothing brands and retailers were today urged to purge their supply chains of tainted "white gold" - cotton from Uzbekistan picked by forced and child labour.

Speaking in Geneva on the World Day Against Child Labour, Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation hit out at the global cotton industry as one of the most exploitative industries employing millions of children in preparing, planting and picking.

"But," he said, "in a generally rotten industry, Uzbekistan stands out as the as the most notorious producing country. Every year, as many as 2 million schoolchildren, some as young as 10 years old, are conscripted for work in the cotton fields. They are often taken far from their homes and forced to work full days, without regard for the weather, picking raw cotton - which is rough physical work even for adults. They are billeted in appalling accommodation with little sanitary facilities, poorly fed and at constant risk of illness or injury. At least 7 children died during the 2008 season.

"The police are used to enforce discipline and make the kids work harder. If parents object to all of this they face harassment, dismissal from their own workplaces and, on occasions, physical violence.

"Trade unions only urge the boycott of industries as a last resort. It is thus an indication of the horror of the cotton industry in Uzbekistan and the total refusal of the government to remedy the abuses that we now want Uzbek cotton outlawed from global markets.

"We welcome the fact that some key clothing global brands and retailers have decided to ensure that they will not market clothing containing Uzbek cotton. We urge every clothing brand and retailer to join the likes of Gap Inc., Wal-Mart and Tesco and boycott totally all cotton from Uzbekistan till it abandons forced and child labour", concluded Mr. Kearney.

Malaysian Union Negotiates Severance Deal for Workers

A dispute over severance pay at the Tai Wah Garments plant in Malaysia has been resolved.

When Tai Wah Garments first announced that as part of a consolidation strategy it would be shutting down its plant in the town of Bahau and moving production to another branch in a neighboring state, nearly 100 kilometers away, workers were told this was a merger, not a closure, and they could either take up their new post or resign.

For the majority of workers employed at the Bahau branch, mainly mothers with young children, the prospect of spending three hours a day on a bus or living in a rooming house away from the family was not acceptable.

Following negotiations between management and ITGLWF affiliate Negeri Sembilan and Malacca Textile and Garment Manufacturing Industry Workers' Union, and the intervention of the main customer, Nike Inc., an agreement was reached providing 80% of severance payments to workers who did not wish to move to the new plant.

The ITGLWF has welcomed the agreement, which was signed last month in front of a labour officer.

Precarious work is focus of 2009 labour film festival

The third annual Geneva Labour Film Shorts Festival features fourteen films from around the world produced by, for, and about unions and working people.

GENEVA: The struggle for precarious workers to win equality on the job takes centre stage at the third annual Geneva Labour Film Shorts Festival, featuring films that tell the story of irregular workers in Korea and the drastic measures they take to be heard; the fight for equality among contract workers in India; the struggle of migrant workers living outside of Tel Aviv in an abandoned shopping mall; and union successes in organising EPZ workers.

A film about undocumented Burmese migrant fishers was awarded Best Labour Film Short of 2009 by the film festival jury. The film, *Abandoned, not forgotten: the plight of Burma's migrant fishers*, produced by the International Transport Workers' Federation, exposes the brutal treatment of migrant workers from Burma who work in Thailand's billion dollar export fishing industry.

Other films to be shown address the need to defend independent media, union strategies to end child labour, the need for maternity protection for women workers and a united steelworkers' response to the global financial crisis. This year's jury is made up of members of the Global Union Communicator's Task Force, representing global union federations and the International Confederation of Trade Unions.

The event will take place in downtown Geneva at the historic Grütli Theatre (rue du General-Dufour 16) on 16 June from 19h00 to 22h00, a reception begins at 18h30 to welcome filmgoers. The festival is hosted by all global union federations, the ITUC and TUAC. The films are in English or have English subtitles and admission is free.

For more information and film programme, visit the festival website at: <http://www.labourfilmshorts.org/>

Pakistan Government Urged to Investigate Campaign of Harassment against Trade Union Leader

The Global Union representing workers in the textile and garment industries has welcomed the release on bail of Pakistani trade union leader Niaz Khan but has expressed concern at his continued victimisation by police even after a judge cleared him of all charges.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation: "Niaz Khan, the General Secretary of the carpet workers union and a leader of the National Trade Union Federation, was arrested last week for supporting workers at the Inter Wood Furniture company in Lahore in their attempts to organise.

“He was arrested in a night raid on his home last Wednesday and indicted on trumped-up charges relating to a 2006 robbery case. The first time Mr. Kahn was named in the case was in a supplementary police report written three years after the case was registered.

“When Mr. Kahn was presented in court in Lahore on Saturday after three days on remand, the Criminal Investigation Agency sought an extension to be able to hold him for a further three days.

“After examining the case, the judge told the prosecutor that it was very unfortunate that a prominent trade union leader had been framed in this manner. He asked the police if there were any other charges pending against him, and when he was told there were not he ordered that Mr. Kahn be discharged and cleared of all charges.

“Unbelievably, however, as Niaz Khan was leaving the court police officers dragged him to a waiting police van claiming they had just remembered that he was in fact wanted in another case.

“It was several hours before the union could determine his whereabouts because the police lied about where he was being held.

“It later emerged that on May 26, while he was in police custody, the police had registered a case against him on allegations of deception and threats.

“When the police failed to present Niaz Khan in court within 24 hours of his arrest as required by law, the union organised a demonstration outside the police station. As a result of such pressure, the police presented him in court on Monday, where he was granted bail.

Concludes Mr. Kearney: “This denial of civil liberties represents a clear case of systematic harassment against a trade union leader merely for peacefully exercising the right of freedom of association. The authorities must now ensure that all charges against him are dropped, that the police put an end to the harassment of Niaz Khan and that the circumstances surrounding his arrest are the subject of an investigation.

International Labour Organisation Urged to Intervene to Secure Release of Pakistani Trade Union Leader

On the eve of the opening of the International Labour Conference in Geneva, the ILO has been asked to intervene with the government of Pakistan to secure the release of detained trade union leaders in Pakistan.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation: “Niaz Khan, head of the ITGLWF-affiliated carpet workers' union and a leader of the National Trade Union Federation, was arrested along with thirty-three others in connection with a dispute at the Inter Wood Furniture company in Lahore, a company which has used a range of dirty tactics to destroy the recently-formed union at the plant.

“It would appear that most have now since been release though Niaz Khan is still in prison on trumped-up charges relating to a robbery some years ago in which he had no involvement. We are extremely concerned at reports that Niaz Khan has been tortured while in prison”.

“Denying trade unionists their fundamental civil liberties and subjecting them to harsh treatment to prevent them from carrying out their legitimate union activities is something that cannot be tolerated”, says Mr. Kearney.

The Global Union Federation has asked the Geneva-based International Labour Organisation to intervene to secure the release of Niaz Khan and any others who are still in detention in relation to this case, and to obtain assurances that Niaz Khan will not be subjected to any further maltreatment.

MAY

Global Union Demands Release of Detained Pakistani Trade Union Leader

The Global Union for textiles and clothing has urged Pakistan's Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gillani to step in to secure the immediate release of the leader of one of its affiliates who was detained earlier this week for conducting legitimate trade union activities.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation: "Niaz Khan, the General Secretary of the carpet workers union and a leader of the National Trade Union Federation, was arrested along with thirty-three others in connection with a dispute at the Inter Wood Furniture company in Lahore, a company which has used a range of dirty tactics to destroy the recently-formed union at the plant, including dismissing union leaders and illegally closing its doors until further notice.

"In spite of warnings from the Crimes Investigation Agency not to get involved in the dispute, Niaz Khan continued to actively support the workers in their struggle.

"In the early hours of Wednesday morning, he and thirty-three union leaders and activists were detained in a series of night raids in the early hours of Tuesday morning. Those arrested include two other leaders of the National Trade Union Federation who were arrested in Lahore and thirty activists of the Labour Qaumi Movement, an organisation supporting textile workers, who were arrested in Faisalabad. The police was looking for a fourth NTUF leader and when they were unable to locate him they arrested his father instead.

"Mr. Khan has been indicted on trumped-up charges of robbery dating back to 2006 in a case in which he was not even named. He appeared in court today and has today been remanded for a further three days. We are deeply concerned at reports that he has been tortured while in detention".

The ITGLWF has urged the government to intervene to secure the immediate and unconditional release of the detained trade union leaders and activists as well as to investigate the allegations that Niaz Khan has been subjected to torture and, if the allegations are found to be true, to punish those responsible. The ITGLWF has further urged the government to intervene to secure a swift resolution to the conflict at the Inter Wood Furniture company.

The ITGLWF is seeking an urgent meeting with Pakistan's Ambassador to Belgium to discuss the matter.

Retailers and Manufacturers Should Embrace Decent Work, World Retail Congress Told

For release after noon on Thursday May 5 2009

Retailers and manufacturers alike should embrace decent work because of its potential to deliver major benefits for all concerned", the World Retail Congress in Barcelona was told today.

"From decent work comes four wins", says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation. "Workers win through better wages and conditions. The employer wins through improved productivity, quality and profitability. The buyer wins through reliable supplies and protection of their reputation and the community and the country of production win through stability of employment and enhanced resources.

But Mr. Kearney says that wishing alone does not make decent work happen, and that achieving it requires mature industrial relations at the workplace. "This is where freedom of association comes into its own, where workers have the right to organise themselves into trade unions and where their trade union representatives dialogue, negotiate and bargain collectively with management on their behalf. In the absence of such representation there is a huge potential for misunderstanding and conflict.

"Freedom of association and collective bargaining are not just human rights. They are also key constituents of good management practice. In reality, freedom of association and collective bargaining are the foundations of mature industrial relations where management and workforce combine their efforts, recognising their interdependence and working together for their common interests.

But only rarely is this fundamental right being respected, says Mr. Kearney "In these sectors there is huge hostility to workers exercising their right to join unions. "When even suspected of thinking about unionisation workers are threatened, harassed and fired. As a result, they are then generally afraid to exercise their rights. At the same time trade unions are denied access to workers".

Mr. Kearney says that a more positive response is needed, and that employers should give each worker an individual written 'right to unionise' guarantee as well as enter into access agreements with representative unions permitting them to meet with workers at mutually-agreed times. Employers should also adopt industrial relations' management systems, including company rules, grievances and disciplinary procedures and a protocol on relations between management and trade unions.

All this is time well spent, says Mr. Kearney. "Take Cambodia, where there have been many disputes and labour stoppages", he says. "Some factories have adopted industrial relations management systems and have recognised trade unions and bargain with them. In the River Rich enterprise, for example, not a single day's work has been lost in the two years since these systems were adopted. There trade unions consult and recommend how work be allocated between lines, a continual source of dispute in the past. Mature industrial relations don't eliminate problems but provide a mechanism where these can be anticipated, identified and dealt with before they escalate into disputes".

The trade union leaders says this approach is gaining ground, with many key buyers now recognising that policing the supply chain through social auditing is not sustainable in the long term and that the future lies in promoting decent work in their supply chains through mature systems of industrial relations.

“This represents a major switch, handing back responsibility for working conditions to where it belongs – the workplace”, concludes Mr. Kearney.

World Retail Congress 2009
7 May 2009, Barcelona, Spain

From Decent Work Comes the Four Wins

By Neil Kearney
General Secretary
International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers’ Federation

30 years ago there was little talk of Corporate Social Responsibility. Employers were expected to take responsibility for those they employed. And they usually did - after a fashion.

Then along came the globalisation of industries like textiles, clothing and footwear. Production moved to countries with few rules and little respect for their application. Worker exploitation became intense. Child labour, beatings, deaths in factory fires, all led to consumer revulsion forcing brands and retailers to begin an effort to clean up their supply chains. Rules for suppliers were set down in codes of conduct with compliance policed by an army of social auditors.

Today, this process constitutes a large part of the CSR business, now a US\$ 60 billion industry. Unfortunately, nearly 15 years of activity and spending have had limited impact – and some of it actually negative.

In the textile, clothing and footwear sectors some improvements have occurred in check list items like health and safety and in high profile issues like child labour. However, recent revelations of the re-emergence of children working in sub-contracting suggest that child labour may just have been pushed into the crevices. At the same time and over the past fourteen years real wages in the sector have fallen by 25% and working hours have increased by 25%. Discrimination is still a major problem and physical abuse against workers is common. There have been no real improvements in human rights issues such as freedom of association and collective bargaining. Indeed, many argue that the situation has actually worsened.

Today, many suppliers – as employers – sit back, even in the face of legal obligation and say “We’ll do it if the buyer insists”. This has ruptured the employment relationship on which national and international labour law is based and which insists that he or she who employs is responsible for he or she employed.

Too often the buyers don’t insist on compliance on the major issues like wages and hours, instead expending their efforts on the easier aspects of health and safety. One recent audit, for example, overlooked undocumented workers, wages that were half the legal minimum and excessive working hours but half of the report was devoted to the positioning of fire extinguishers.

No wonder standards have slipped! And no wonder many, including key brands and retailers are questioning whether the US\$ 60 billion CSR expenditure is money well spent.

So, what are the key issues that need addressing in the textile, clothing and footwear sectors?

1. All workers should be permanent registered employees. Too often this is not the case. In Turkey, for example, 4 out of every 5 workers are not registered. They have no rights. In Peru, most workers are on short-term contracts - permanently. Again, these workers are totally vulnerable as their contracts are not renewed if they raise the slightest complaint about their working conditions or if they even consider joining a trade union.

2. Workers should earn a living wage sufficient to feed, clothe and house themselves and their families in a manner appropriate to the country concerned. The United Nations defines poverty as living on less than US\$ 2 a day. Yet across Asia and Africa millions of workers in full-time employment earn less than this. In Bangladesh the legal minimum wage is only US\$ 25 – less than US\$ 1 a day. The United Nations defines this as absolute poverty.

3. Working hours should not exceed 48 hours per week. Overtime should not be worked on a regular basis, should be voluntary and never exceed 12 hours per week. In reality, in the garment industry 12 to 14 hour days are common. And, on occasions, round the clock working is demanded on pain of dismissal. With the combination of low wages and excessive working hours it's little wonder there are frequent reports of women workers collapsing at their machines from malnutrition and exhaustion.

What image does this give the textile, clothing and footwear industries?

4. There should be no abusive treatment of workers. On the contrary, far too often workers are shouted at and sworn at and hit by supervisors and junior managers. This is often due to lack of adequate training for supervisors and managers.

5. No worker under the age of 15 should be employed and no worker under the age of 18 should be engaged in dangerous work. Proper recruitment procedures are needed to avoid this happening.

6. Workers should not be subjected to health and safety risks. This requires attention to fire safety, use of chemicals and general good housekeeping.

7. Being a responsible employer providing decent work doesn't happen by chance. Wishing it alone doesn't make it happen. Comprehensive and transparent management systems are required including: company rules; grievances and disciplinary procedures; and a communications process where the voice of workers informs management decisions.

When discussing workplace communications a common response of managers is "My door is always open". On the other hand the common reaction of workers is "Yes, so that he can watch us".

Good communications means management objectives being clear to all and with a backflow of reactions and suggestions from workers. This can't be done on a one to one basis. It requires representatives from both sides sitting down and dialoguing together.

This is where freedom of association comes into its own, where workers have the right to organise themselves into trade unions and where their trade union representatives dialogue, negotiate and bargain collectively with management on their behalf.

In the absence of such representation there is a huge potential for misunderstanding and conflict. Take Bangladesh where a couple of years ago in a very modern factory workers received less wages than in the previous month when they had worked less hours. Without industrial relations systems in place and without representation none had the courage to raise the issue with the management. However, they stopped work and began discussing among themselves. Outraged at the stoppage one manager struck out at the workers creating a riot situation in the factory in which one worker was killed, a large part of the factory was thrashed and leading to 18 months of disruption throughout Bangladesh's garment industry. These are the consequences of the absence of industrial relations management systems and a dearth of communication.

Freedom of association and collective bargaining are not just human rights. They are also key constituents of good management practice. In reality, freedom of association and collective bargaining are the foundations of mature industrial relations where management and workforce combine their efforts, recognising their interdependence and working together for their common interests.

Again this doesn't happen by chance.

In these sectors there is huge hostility to workers exercising their right to join unions. When even suspected of thinking about unionisation workers are threatened, harassed and fired. As a result, they are then generally afraid to exercise their rights. At the same time trade unions are denied access to workers.

So, it is not enough for employers to say "I am not against trade unions". Rights such as freedom of association and collective bargaining are rights which require a more positive response. The ITGLWF recommends employers give an individual written "right to unionise" guarantee to every worker and to all new recruits. Such a guarantee makes clear that the employer supports the right of the workforce to join a trade union, indicates that the employer will recognise and bargain with that union and will not discriminate against workers who become members.

The ITGLWF also recommends that employers conclude "Access" agreements with trade unions permitting them to meet their workforce at mutually agreed times. This is vitally important, especially in Export Processing Zones where access to workers is near impossible.

A key part of industrial relations management systems should include a protocol on relations between management and trade union spelling out the rights and responsibilities of each. A central part of the protocol should aim to promote dialogue and not just about the demands of both sides but concentrating on short daily briefings and de-briefings on production problems; solutions; and upcoming challenges, and how to meet them. It should include a weekly review of developments including bottlenecks; challenges; and progress. Finally, it should include regular monthly meetings where important industrial relations issues are examined in greater depth.

All this is time well spent. Take Cambodia, where there have been many disputes and labour stoppages. Some factories have adopted industrial relations management systems and have recognised trade unions and bargain with them. In the River Rich enterprise, for example, not a single day's work has been lost in the two years since these systems were adopted. Their trade unions consult and recommend how work be allocated between lines, a continual source of dispute in the past. Mature industrial relations don't eliminate problems but it provides a mechanism where these can be anticipated, identified and dealt with before they escalate into disputes.

So, where can suppliers as employers get advice and assistance? The ITGLWF would recommend going first to labour ministries, also seek advice from key buyers and don't hesitate to approach local and national unions seeking information and advice on how to build systems to minimise the potential for dispute.

The ITGLWF has itself developed a number of components of industrial relations management systems, including grievance and disciplinary procedures and protocols for relations between unions and managements and works with buyers, unions and management to put in place mature systems of industrial relations. We also provide training on the use of such systems to both trade unions and managements.

This support approach is gaining ground. Many key buyers now believe the US\$ 60 billion expenditure on CSR could be better spent by switching from policing and auditing to support. For example, Nike, Gap and Next publicly say that the present approach is not sustainable in the long term and that the future lies in mature systems of industrial relations. Inditex has gone a step further and concluded a Global Framework Agreement with the ITGLWF and both are working together to make mature industrial relations a reality in key Inditex suppliers across the world.

This represents a major switch handing back responsibility for working conditions to where it belongs – the workplace. Properly undertaken this should result in continuous monitoring of conditions from within an enterprise as opposed to irregular visits by external auditors.

But this approach can only be effective in situations of mature industrial relations with real social dialogue and where the energies of both managers and workforce have been harnessed for the monitoring process enhancing both its effectiveness and credibility.

The objective is decent work and mature industrial relations is the route to that decent work.

Of course, some will question “Why bother about decent work?” Why bother indeed?

Analysis shows a direct correlation between bad working conditions and low productivity, poor quality, and late delivery. Inattention to conditions of work and industrial relations usually means poor or weak managements failing to realise the full potential of an enterprise.

Decent work, on the other hand, is usually accompanied by above average productivity, better quality production and ability to deliver on time, all elements necessary for a viable, profitable and internationally competitive business.

From decent work comes the four wins. Workers win through better wages and conditions. The employer wins through improved productivity, quality and profitability. The buyer wins through reliable supplies and protection of their reputation and the community and the country of production win through stability of employment and enhanced resources.

These are the reasons why major brands and retailers like Inditex, Nike, GAP, Next and Walmart are promoting decent work in their supply chains. They are the reasons why every textile, clothing and footwear manufacturer should embrace that same decent work.

STATEMENT BY DERI-IS / ETUF:TCL / ITGLWF

Why Are They Waiting ? A Year and a Day Later, Illegally Fired Desa Workers Still on the Streets

A year and a day ago, Desa Deri Sanayi A.Ş, an up-market Turkish leather goods supplier to top name fashion brands like Prada and Mulberry, began firing workers who had joined the leather workers' trade union Turkiye Deri Is Sendikasi .

The Turkish Labour Court declared all 29 dismissals considered so far to be illegal and ordered the workers re-instated. Appeals by Desa against the decisions in the first 18 of these cases have been thrown out by the Supreme Court upholding the re-instatement orders. But still the workers remain on the streets - literally, as one of the women, Emine, has sat outside the Desa factory in Istanbul every one of the 366 days since her dismissal. The passage of time has strengthened, not weakened, the determination of the workers' union, Deri-Is and its European and global counterparts, the European Trade Union Federation: Textiles, Clothing and Leather and the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation to get the fired workers back to work in conditions of mature industrial relations where the European norms of trade union recognition, social dialogue and decent work are respected.

The union organisations have renewed their calls for Desa to keep its earlier promises to abide by the court decisions, engage with Deri-Is and begin the process of re-instatement accompanied by the introduction of a mutually-beneficial system of industrial relations in the company's factories.

Deri-Is, the ETUF:TCL and the ITGLWF are also seeking stronger and more urgent action by the major European buyers, including Prada, El Corte Ingles, Daniel Hechter, Mulberry, Debenhams, Jaeger and Marks and Spencer - all of whose codes of conduct on trade union rights and representation have been ignored by Desa - to insist that the company abide by Turkish law and international labour standards, re-instate the illegally fired workers and establish sound and sustainable industrial relations with Deri-Is, its social partner.

The unions welcome the efforts of some of the buyers, under the umbrella of the Ethical Trading Initiative, to work for a solution but are critical of the apparent lack of urgency given that many of the workers have been illegally deprived of their livelihood for a year or more. They are scathing of other buyers who have sat on the sidelines doing nothing while their codes of conduct have been blatantly flouted, accusing them of corporate social irresponsibility.

The unions believe that, after a year and a day, this issue has dragged on for a year too long and unless Desa now acts to abide by the court decisions and in accordance with international labour standards and its contractual obligations under the codes of conduct of its buyers, the image of the entire Turkish textile, clothing and leather export industry will be irreparably damaged putting much of the industry at risk in these times of economic downturn.

Global Union Outlines Urgent Measures Needed to Assist Workers and Establish a Strategy for Recovery

Over eleven million jobs lost in the past nine months and a further three million at risk is the stark tally of the impact of economic crisis on employment in the textile, garment and footwear industry, according to the Global Union representing workers in the sectors.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation: "In many countries the clothing industry is the main sector of industry, and for workers who lose their jobs in this sector the prospects of finding alternative employment are bleak. The situation is particularly tragic for workers in developing countries where there are no social safety nets. In addition, as many as 80 per cent of the workers involved are women and again the vast majority are less than 24 years old and often the only breadwinner in their extended family.

"Migrant workers are, as always, among the most badly affected. Migrant workers typically owe recruitment fees - sometimes as high as US\$5,000, the equivalent of ten years wages at the local minimum wage - and losing their jobs leaves them unable to pay off their debts. Bangladesh alone has some 6 million migrant workers, many employed in overseas textile, garment or shoe enterprises and their forced return to their country will further increase pressures.

"Those workers who are employed are often reduced to short-time working and face demands from employers for wage cuts, longer working hours and unpaid overtime, and this in an industry where wages for a standard working week usually fall well below what is needed to survive. This situation has been made worse by the fact that many buyers from brands and retailers have been demanding price cuts, often in mid-contract.

"Healthy companies that are able to expand - particularly those in the garment sector - often find themselves unable to do so because of the lack of liquidity as bank lending has dried up.

"Unfortunately trade unions in many countries, after years of suppression, are weak and unprepared for the task of adequately representing and defending workers at this crucial time, when workers are being asked to make sacrifices without any guarantee of reward when economic recovery returns.

"At its meeting in March, the Presidium of the ITGLWF outlined the urgent measures needed to assist workers withstand the pressures of the moment and to establish a strategy for recovery. Such a plan should be comprehensive and should include the following elements:

- Governments must take the lead in relieving the crisis and preparing for recovery, providing economic, industrial and social infrastructure, including social safety nets, and strictly enforcing legislation, particularly labour legislation;
- The various stimulus packages currently being rolled out need to be increased and better targeted putting emphasis on the retention and creation of decent jobs;
- Manufacturing industry must be recognized as a key and essential element of all national economies;

- The consolidation of textile, garment and footwear supply chains should be based on shifting orders to suppliers who provide decent work through respect for international labour standards and no new suppliers should be added who do not meet this criteria;
- Demands for wage cuts and the lowering of working conditions as a means of dealing with the crisis are unacceptable should be strongly rejected;
- Demands for the payment of a living wage throughout the industry should be vigorously pursued as a key stimulus for increasing local consumption and driving recovery;
- Training and retraining, particularly of displaced workers or those working reduced hours, should be an important element in preparing workers with new skills or, where the sector has a limited future, to prepare for alternative employment;
- Companies in the sector must be provided with access to credit at reasonable interest rates;
- Workers and their trade unions must be enabled to play a full role, at all level, in tackling the crisis and in the development of strategies for recovery;
- A collaborative approach, at country level, should be fostered through the creation at the of tripartite economic and social councils for the industry in all important producing nations;
- Trade unions everywhere must rise to the challenge of organizing and adequately representing workers in the face of crisis;
- The international institutions including the World Bank and the International Labour Organization must join in a global collaborative effort to ease the impact of the crisis and to plan for recovery;
- In particular, the ILO must use the crisis to drive adherence to its core Conventions and insist that Member States enact and fully implement legislation to achieve these aims;
- The MFA Forum, which includes all the key players including governments, the international institutions, including the ILO and the World Bank, buyers, manufacturers, trade unions and civil society bodies institutions must play a pivotal role in developing a comprehensive short, medium and long term action plan for the survival and growth of the industry.

March

INTERNATIONAL TEXTILE, GARMENT AND LEATHER WORKERS FEDERATION

Presidium Meeting, Frankfurt, Germany, March 30 2009

STATEMENT ON THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

The impact of the economic crisis on the textile, garment, leather and footwear sectors has been dramatic. Since June 2008, over 8,200 factories have closed and an estimated 11.5 million workers have lost their jobs. As many as a further 3 million jobs are estimated to be at risk. For many of these workers, the prospects of finding alternative employment are bleak.

The situation is particularly tragic for workers in developing countries where there are no social safety nets. In addition, as many as 80 per cent of the workers involved are women and again the vast majority are less than 24 years old and often the only breadwinner in their extended family.

Migrant workers are, as always, among the most vulnerable of these workers. Migrant workers typically owe recruitment fees - sometimes as high as US\$5,000, the equivalent of ten years wages at the local minimum wage - and losing their jobs leaves them unable to pay off their debts. Bangladesh alone has some 6 million migrant workers, many employed in overseas textile, garment or shoe enterprises and their forced return to their country will further increase pressures.

Those workers who are employed are often reduced to short-time working, face demands from employers for wage cuts, longer working hours and unpaid overtime, and this in an industry where wages for a standard working week usually fall well below what is needed to survive. This situation has been made worse by the fact that many buyers from brands and retailers have been demanding price cuts, often in mid-contract.

Healthy companies that are able to expand - particularly those in the garment sector - often find themselves unable to do so because of the lack of liquidity as bank lending has dried up.

Unfortunately trade unions in many countries, after years of suppression, are weak and unprepared for the task of adequately representing and defending workers at this crucial time.

The International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation noting that in this crisis, as in those that preceded it, workers are being asked to make sacrifices without any guarantee of reward when economic recovery returns believes that urgent measures are needed to assist workers withstand the pressures of the moment and to establish a strategy for recovery. Such a plan should be comprehensive and should include the following elements:

- Governments must take the lead in relieving the crisis and preparing for recovery, providing economic, industrial and social infrastructure, including social safety nets, and strictly enforcing legislation, particularly labour legislation;
- The various stimulus packages currently being rolled out need to be increased and better targeted putting emphasis on the retention and creation of decent jobs;
- Manufacturing industry must be recognized as a key and essential element of all national economies;
- The consolidation of textile, garment and footwear supply chains should be based on shifting orders to suppliers who provide decent work through respect for international labour standards and no new suppliers should be added who do not meet this criteria;
- Demands for wage cuts and the lowering of working conditions as a means of dealing with the crisis are unacceptable should be strongly rejected;
- Demands for the payment of a living wage throughout the industry should be vigorously pursued as a key stimulus for increasing local consumption and driving recovery;

- Training and retraining, particularly of displaced workers or those working reduced hours, should be an important element in preparing workers with new skills or, where the sector has a limited future, to prepare for alternative employment;
- Companies in the sector must be provided with access to credit at reasonable interest rates;
- Workers and their trade unions must be enabled to play a full role, at all level, in tackling the crisis and in the development of strategies for recovery;
- A collaborative approach, at country level, should be fostered through the creation at the of tripartite economic and social councils for the industry in all important producing nations;
- Trade unions everywhere must rise to the challenge of organizing and adequately representing workers in the face of crisis;
- The international institutions including the World Bank and the International Labour Organization must join in a global collaborative effort to ease the impact of the crisis and to plan for recovery;
- In particular, the ILO must use the crisis to drive adherence to its core Conventions and insist that Member States enact and fully implement legislation to achieve these aims;
- The MFA Forum, which includes all the key players including governments, the international institutions, including the ILO and the World Bank, buyers, manufacturers, trade unions and civil society bodies institutions must play a pivotal role in developing a comprehensive short, medium and long term action plan for the survival and growth of the industry.

Swedish Affiliate IF Metall Agrees Crisis Deal in Bid to Prevent Massive Job Losses

The ITGLWF's Swedish affiliate IF Metall has reached an agreement with employers aimed at preventing massive job losses. Some 25,000 IF Metall union members have so far lost their jobs and a further 40,000 have been warned their jobs are at risk in the current economic crisis.

The agreement was signed earlier this month between IF Metall and three employers' federations covering metal, chemical, textiles and other sectors.

The one-year deal allows employers and plant-level unions to agree special arrangements, such as reduced working time or educational leave, as a means of avoiding making workers redundant.

Under the scheme workers are able to keep their jobs and receive 80% of their wages, which because of the additional compensation paid by employers amounts to more than they would receive on unemployment benefit.

The framework agreement was reached at national level but arrangements must be negotiated at local level between employers and plant level unions.

IF Metall says it reached the agreement with employers after its proposals to the government fell on deaf ears. The union says its members are making a significant contribution and they

will now be looking to the government to make greater efforts to providing funding for training.

Salvadoran Labour Ministry Asked to Put a Stop to Union Busting at US-owned plant

El Salvador's Labour Minister José Roberto Espinal Escobar has been asked to intervene to prevent the US multinational Hanesbrands from illegally wiping out union representation at its Inversiones Bonaventure plant outside San Salvador.

The Brussels-based International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF) has warned the government that the actions of companies like Inversiones Bonaventure are besmirching the image of El Salvador's garment industry in what are already very difficult times.

Says ITGLWF General Secretary Neil Kearney: "On February 6 the company eliminated its night shift and laid off 164 workers, the majority of whom were members and leaders of the branch of the Sindicato de Trabajadores de las Industrias Textiles (STIT).

"The restructuring, which resulted in the dismissal of every trade union leader and virtually the entire membership, was the culmination of months' of anti-union discrimination on the part of the company.

"The company initially dismissed the union leaders, but when they protested at the illegality of the decision management then changed tack and offered them two years' severance on condition they sign an agreement saying they had resigned voluntarily and without any pressure from the company.

"The company used scare tactics to push them into accepting the deal, falsely claiming that their union credentials were not in proper order but saying the company was prepared to overlook this fact if the dismissed leaders agreed to 'resign'.

"The truth is that Inversiones Bonaventure has broken the law in order to rid itself of the union. It dismissed 164 workers supposedly for 'economic reasons' but failed to seek authorisation from the labour courts as required by the Labour Code. Among them were seven union leaders who were dismissed in violation of the Salvadoran law which protects union leaders from dismissal.

"In defiance of good industrial relations' practices, the company failed to engage in dialogue or to provide any advance notice of the restructuring, and this in spite of the fact that a union-management committee had been set up at the plant under the auspices of the Labour Ministry in order to promote regular dialogue on issues affecting workers, and in spite of a specific request from STIT to engage in dialogue on the company's restructuring plans.

"Moreover, the dismissed workers have reported that a blacklist of union leaders and activists appears to be in effect. Indeed, several workers have been told, upon applying for new jobs, that their prospective employer is not authorised to hire workers from Inversiones Bonaventure.

"We have asked the company to offer reinstatement to the union leaders, to ensure the union can operate freely within the factory, to engage in dialogue with the union on issues

affecting workers, to introduce sound industrial relations procedures, and to take measures to address the blacklisting of workers.

“The Labour Ministry must now step in as a matter of urgency to seek a solution to the problems that have arisen at Inversiones Bonaventure”, concluded Mr. Kearney.

Brands and Retailers Asked to Intervene at Peru’s Hilandería Hialpesa

Multinational customers sourcing from Hilandería Hialpesa in Peru have been asked to intervene to stop the company from trampling trade union rights.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the Brussels-based International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers’ Federation: “Last year, workers at Hialpesa who had grown tired of the abuse they were suffering at the hands of their employer began flocking to the union in order to seek improvements in their working conditions.

“Violations at the plant include 12-hour shifts, excessively high targets, abusive behaviour from supervisors, the continuous employment of workers on short-term contracts, unsafe food in the canteen which has more than once sent dozens of workers to hospital with gastroenteritis, and the non-payment of profit-sharing bonuses.

“Over the following months most of those workers – all long-standing employees with good records - suddenly found that when their contracts expired their services were no longer needed. Unless, that is, they were prepared to renounce their union membership.

“Getting rid of union members was made easy by the fact that the workers were employed under the regime governing ‘non traditional’ exports, which allows employers to hire workers on temporary contracts indefinitely.

“Peruvian laws protecting workers from dismissal without just cause or for having joined a union are meaningless when employers can simply fail to renew a worker’s temporary contract without justification”, says Mr. Kearney.

“In fact, though, the dismissed workers should never have been employed on temporary contracts in the first place because the company does not qualify under Decree 22342, which requires a company to export 70% of its production and to employ workers to fill specific export orders.

“Those dismissed from Hialpesa had been employed in some cases for as long as eighteen years – the equivalent of seventy short-term contracts !. They were employed as textile operators to carry out permanent functions unrelated to specific customer orders. And according to the company’s own website, Hialpesa exports only 60% of its production.

“Because Decree 22342 gives employers free rein in their exploitative labour practices, it is not surprising that unscrupulous companies are prepared to cheat in order to pass themselves off as ‘non traditional’ exporting companies” says Mr. Kearney.

“The government of Peru is culpable not only of keeping such retrograde laws in effect but also of turning a blind eye when employers fraudulently take advantage of those laws”.

Concludes Mr. Kearney: “Hialpesa describes itself as modern and sophisticated but in reality its employment practices have more in common with an informal home-based business than a multi-million dollar vertically-integrated export company.

The global union federation has asked Hialpesa to reinstate with backpay the workers fired in violation of the right of freedom of association and to ensure that workers wrongly hired under temporary contracts are provided with permanent contracts.

“The company’s clients, including American Eagle Outfitters, Vanity Fair Corporation, Eddie Bauer, Victoria’s Secret and Guess? Inc, must now make it clear to Hialpesa that the company must comply with national laws and international labour standards”, concluded Mr. Kearney.

Global Brands and Retailers Hold the Key to Snuffing out the Evil of Trafficked Labour’, Says Global Union

Trafficking of workers and their subsequent slavery is a growing problem in the labour cost conscious global garment and footwear industry which is increasingly resorting to the use of migrant labour, including trafficked child workers. But, it wouldn't happen if there wasn't a market for it - if business simply outlawed the employment of slave labour and with big name brands taking the lead, the sector's Global Union said today.

Speaking in Bahrain during an international conference on human trafficking and slavery, Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation said that the textiles, clothing and leather industries were employing more and more migrant labour from countries such as Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Indonesia for use around the world including in Mauritius, Jordan, Egypt, Malaysia and Taiwan.

“A feature of this migrant labour is that it is generally young and female with the workers involved paying large recruitment fees, travel costs and handling charges to labour brokers and agents, leaving them owing as much as US\$10,000 even before they leave their home country”, said Mr. Kearney.

“These debts are usually commuted into loans secured by the surrender of their identity documents, thus condemning them to bonded labour and often indefinite slavery. Bangladeshi migrants in Malaysia, for example, have had to buy fake passports to secure their escape from the country.

“Global brands and retailers dominate the industry so hold the key to snuffing out the evil of trafficked and slave industrial labour. All need to take urgent and practical steps to rid supply chains of this modern day slavery. They can do so fairly simply by imposing contractual obligations on their suppliers to:

- meet all direct and indirect costs of labour recruitment;
- employ workers only on direct and permanent contracts;
- not use any worker who had to pay recruitment, travel or handling fees;
- not retain workers' identity documents and where workers ask that these be held for safe keeping ensure that they are available to the worker concerned 24 hours a day;
- ensure that workers are free to come and go as they please when accommodation is provided by the employer.

“Nike have, since January 1 this year, imposed such requirements throughout their supply chain. Trade Unions, including the ITGLWF want to see all other brands and retailers adopting the same approach”, concluded Mr. Kearney.

February

Don't Let the Crisis go to Waste'

Speaking on the economic recession, the General Secretary of the Global Union representing textile and garment workers yesterday decried a financial system in which a worker in Bangladesh's garment industry would have to work 118,000 years to earn the annual bonus that Merrill Lynch's former CEO paid to himself even as the company was being sold to the Bank of America.

"Something has gone terribly wrong with our world", said Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation at the launch at the European Parliament of the book "Glokers - People, places and ideas about globalised labour" by Silvana Cappuccio.

"Just after announcing a Euro 21 billion loss last year, Merrill Lynch's CEO set aside Euro 3 billion in bonuses for senior staff including a staggering Euro 27 million for himself.

"This was done while Merrill Lynch was being sold to Bank of America which itself then posted losses of Euro 31 billion and whose own CEO paid himself Euro 19.5 million last year.

"Shortly after being bailed out by the US government to the tune of Euro 35 billion, Bank of America hosted a meeting to co-ordinate opposition to proposals to make trade union recognition easier in the United States!

"What hypocrites?

"The CEO of Home Depot told the meeting that it would be the end of civilization as we know it if US companies had to deal with Unions.

"Yes, this was the same Home Depot that paid its former CEO Euro 195 million when it fired him after only 11 months in the job!

"The end of civilization! What civilization?

"Today, more than 2 million workers, mainly women, slave in Bangladesh's garment industry, sometimes 14 to 16 hours a day for less than Euro 19 a month – Euro 230 a year.

"One of these garment workers would have to work 118,000 years to earn the annual bonus of Merrill Lynch's former CEO!

"Put another way, the pay packages the CEOs of Merrill Lynch and Bank of America paid themselves would require a month and a half of work by every one of Bangladesh's two million garment workers.

"Given their long hours and poverty level wages it isn't surprising that many of these workers frequently collapse at their sewing machines from a combination of exhaustion and malnutrition.

"Such exploitation is the outcome of 20 years of unfettered globalization, liberalization and deregulation. The impact on workers has been disastrous. In the last 10 years real wages in the textile, clothing and footwear industries have fallen by 25% while working hours have increased by 25%.

“No wonder brands and retailers like Wal-Mart are able to announce annual profits of more than Euro10 billion from this slavery. And many leading retailers like Tesco and Marks and Spencer are using the global recession to try to wring further price cuts from their suppliers, price cuts that will be paid by workers in the form of wage reductions, longer working hours and poorer working conditions.

“Not content with the current floor level wages the industry continues to seek more for less and now relies increasingly on a growing army of migrant workers even more vulnerable to exploitation. Former textile workers in Romania are flooding Western Europe in search of domestic work because they can't afford to live on the wages paid in local industry. Their places are, in turn, taken by migrant workers brought in from China and paid even less.

“Wages everywhere in the sector are appalling. And not just in the least developed countries. In Bulgaria a shoe worker now has to work 6.25 hours to buy a kilo of beef, 2.5 hours to buy a liter of cooking oil and 1.5 hours to buy a kilo of sugar. So, more than 10 hours work a day and the rent isn't even covered.

“Government's responding to the global recession today talk about the need for financial repair. What we urgently need is social repair - jobs that pay a living wage for a standard work week, protection from injury and abuse and the right of every worker to join a union and to bargain with their employer for decent work.

“Someone said the other day, “Never let a crisis go to waste”. We've had enough of uncontrolled globalization, deregulation and free for all exploitation. We've lived the experience of abandoning manufacturing in favor of dependence on banking and financial services. We're now suffering the consequences.

“Economists say we should be searching for an intellectual compass as the crisis deepens. Forget the intellectual! We should be establishing a moral and social compass where decent work will be at the heart of action to lead the way out of recession. And that means not letting this crisis go to waste but instead use it to demand a new economic and social terrain as the strategy for recovery and beyond.

“How do we get there?

- “Ignore the pleas of those who created this mess to “keep governments out of our hair” and instead strengthen their role in setting economic, financial and social standards;
- “Increase and better target the numerous stimulus packages now being rolled out putting emphasis on the retention and creation of decent jobs rather than tax cuts for the rich and bonuses for the casino cowboys of the banking world;
- “Promote manufacturing industry as a key and essential element of all national economies;
- “Reject wage cuts and worsening conditions as measures that will only further drive recessionary pressures;
- “Insist on the payment of a living wage to every worker as a key stimulus for increasing consumption and driving recovery;
- “Put education and training, particularly training for green jobs at the heart of strategic planning for recovery;
- “Demand a central role for workers and trade unions at all levels in tackling the crisis. The influence of unions in the crafting of Germany's measures to slow and reverse the recession has given those measures a distinctly social flavor aimed at avoiding the destruction of jobs and providing a springboard to take advantage of the very first signs of recovery.

“It is now very clear that the route to the future cannot be ‘business as usual’”, concluded Mr. Kearney. “Unregulated globalization and market forces have put in jeopardy the future of 20

million workers in the textile, garment and shoe industries, families, their communities and countries. We cannot go on like this! We cannot waste the current crisis but must use it to drive real change where decent work providing a living wage will be the cornerstone of the global economy”.

Cambodia’s Plans for Indefinite Use of Temporary Employment Contracts Come under Fire

The Global Union representing workers in the textile and clothing sector is taking action to oppose proposed amendments to Cambodia’s labour law aimed at extending the use of temporary employment contracts.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the Brussels-based International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers’ Federation: “The widespread use of temporary contracts in Cambodia has had a very negative impact on worker rights in our sector. Such contracts represent a major obstacle to the right of freedom of association as they enable employers to get rid of trade union leaders with ease by simply failing to renew their temporary contracts. In addition, contracts of less than one year allow employers to avoid key obligations to workers, including maternity and sick leave.

“The use of short-term contracts has till now been a grey area of the law, though the Arbitration Council has interpreted the labour code to require that employees who have worked for an employer for two years must be treated as permanent employees.

“The private sector has been lobbying the government to amend these provisions and as a result the Ministry of Labor has drafted proposed amendments that would enable employers to hire workers on temporary contracts indefinitely.

“A number of garment manufacturers have reportedly already begun switching from permanent to temporary contracts.

“The proposed amendments are inconsistent with good multistakeholder and corporate codes of conduct, which ban companies from using short-term contracts as a means of avoiding legal obligations to workers”, says Mr. Kearney.

The ITGLWF has made approaches to the brands participating in the Better Factories Programme, urging them to publicly insist that their suppliers refrain from using short-term employment contracts.

The Global Union has also made representations to the government, warning that the proposed changes would make Cambodia less competitive from the point of view of corporate social responsibility and calling on the government to desist in its efforts to extend the use of temporary contracts.

Says Mr. Kearney: “As the current worldwide recession continues to deepen and brands and retailers are forced to cut back their orders, many are looking to give priority to suppliers that perform the best both on production criteria and on social compliance. In order to weather the crisis and prepare for recovery, it is therefore of vital importance that Cambodia upholds the protection of workers in the sector”.

The Global Union is considering further action, including the possibility of a formal complaint to the International Labour Organisation.

“Greed and Negligence Putting Peru’s Textile and Garment Export Industry at Risk”, Says Global Union

“The widespread and often fraudulent use of temporary employment contracts is damaging Peru’s textile and garment export industry”, President Alan García was warned today.

In a letter to the Peruvian President, Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the Brussels-based International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers’ Federation (ITGLWF) said that while Peru has the opportunity of being a major player in world export markets, its current labour legislation and the way it is being used is making it impossible for international brands and retailers to ensure that their contractual requirements regarding social compliance are met.

“Short-term contracts are denying workers job security and the right to organise and condemning them to long working hours, low wages, poor conditions, abusive treatment and limited access to health and pension coverage as a result of their non-continuous employment”, says Mr. Kearney.

“At the same time these contracts are condemning the industry to high turnover rates, a poorly-trained workforce, low productivity, and a reputation for posing a threat to the image of the brands and retailers sourcing from Peru. Hardly a recipe for sustainability in difficult markets!”

Of particular concern to the ITGLWF is Decree No. 22342 which establishes a special contractual regime allowing ‘non traditional exporting companies’ to employ workers on short-term contracts.

“When these provisions were introduced thirty years ago as a ‘temporary’ measure, the argument was that special incentives were needed to promote Peru’s textile and garment export industry which at the time was virtually non-existent”, says Mr. Kearney.

“Today, the situation could not be more different. Peru exports some 850 million US dollars in textiles and apparel to the US alone, has a free trade agreement with the United States and enjoys special incentives for exports to the European Union under the GSP+ scheme. Yet employers producing for export markets are still hiring workers on three-month contracts or shorter – even if they have to break the law to do so.

“In order to qualify to hire temporary workers an employer must be accredited as a non-traditional exporting company, must export 70% of its production and must employ workers to work on specific export orders – which means that a worker hired to produce short-sleeved cotton blouses might not be kept on to work on an order for sleeveless cotton tops for the same buyer.

“Companies found to be in breach of these requirements must modify their workers’ contracts to make them permanent.

“However, it is becoming increasingly evident that a potentially large number of companies are hiring temporary workers in breach of the law, and the authorities are standing by and doing nothing.

“Take Universal Textil, a leading Peruvian exporting company which recently failed to renew the contracts of workers who had joined a union. In June 2007, the labour authorities found that the company was employing 1,257 workers on temporary contracts in spite of not meeting the required export levels, and ordered it to make its workers permanent. Twenty

months and three unsuccessful appeals later, Universal Textil continues to ignore the order, and the labour authorities have done nothing to force the company to comply.

“Another example is Hilandería Hialpesa, which has failed to renew the contracts of 150 union members. Some of those dismissed had been continuously employed for eighteen years on over 70 three-month contracts. The workers concerned were employed to perform permanent functions in the textile process. Their jobs existed before they were hired and have been filled by other workers since their dismissal. In other words, they are clearly in a ‘de facto’ permanent employment relationship and can in no way be considered as temporary workers hired to fulfill a specific export order.

“Icadie and its parent company Diseño y Color is another example of the fraudulent use of temporary contracts. Last year the ITGLWF intervened to seek the reinstatement of workers who had lost their jobs after joining a union. After finding that Icadie was not registered on the Register of Non Traditional Exporting Companies, the Labour Ministry ordered the company to give the workers permanent contracts. The company failed to do so, and again the government did nothing.

“At the ITGLWF’s request one of the company’s buyers, Gap Inc, intervened to ensure Icadie’s compliance with its code of conduct, but the persistent failure of the company to address its concerns left the buyer with no choice but to sever its relationship”.

President Alan García has been asked to intervene in the cases of Hialpesa and Universal Textil to ensure that the workers fired for joining a union are reinstated with back pay and that the workers illegally hired under temporary contracts are made permanent as of their date of entry.

The ITGLWF has further asked the government to take action to repeal Decree 22342 and to bring Peru’s labour laws into line with international standards. As a first step, the Global Union has called for an immediate investigation into the illegal use of short-term contracts in the industry.

Concludes Mr. Kearney: “The textile and apparel export industry is today an important component of the Peruvian economy but the greed of employers and the negligence of the government is putting the future of the industry at risk. The sector urgently needs a clean-up with immediate government intervention to improve labour protection for workers in the sector”.

January

Should Retailers Be Sourcing from Turkish Manufacturer Menderes Tekstil?

The continued failure of a leading Turkish manufacturer of home textiles to address serious worker issues raises the question of whether the company is a credible business partner for the brands sourcing from the factory, says the Global Union Federation representing workers in the industry.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers’ Federation (ITGLWF): “When workers at the Menderes Tekstil factory began to organise, they came under huge pressure to resign their union membership. Those that refused to do were dismissed.

“The ITGLWF asked Menderes to end its anti-union discrimination and to reinstate all those dismissed as a result of their union membership. In the absence of a response, the ITGLWF sought the support of the company’s buyers, urging them to send the company a clear message that this unacceptable behaviour would not be tolerated and that solutions must be found to bring the company into line with international standards on freedom of association.

“But Menderes’ inaction and the way it has responded to some of its buyers suggests disdain and a lack of respect for the contractual requirements imposed by buyers”, says Mr. Kearney. “In these circumstances one wonders whether Menderes is a reasonable business partner.

“However”, added Mr. Kearney, “we presume Menderes does not want to jeopardise its own business and at the same time cast a blot on the image of Turkish manufacturing, and we are therefore suggest a meeting at the earliest possible time to resolve this conflict.”

Carrefour Indifference to Worker Rights Casts Shadow on GSCP

“Can the Global Social Compliance Programme be taken seriously when one of its founding members, French retail giant Carrefour, doesn’t appear to pay any attention to serious violations in its own supply chain?”. This is the question posed today by Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation.

“The GSCP claims to be a ground-breaking initiative aimed at encouraging a unified approach to promoting good working conditions in the supply chain, but the behaviour of Carrefour in dealing with violations at one of its Turkish suppliers does not bode well for its effectiveness”, says Mr. Kearney.

“For the past six months Carrefour has ignored the plight of workers at Menderes Tekstil who were unfairly dismissed for having exerted the right of freedom of association.

“The ITGLWF asked Menderes to reinstate the workers dismissed for having joined a union, and when the company did not respond the company’s customers were asked to intervene to find a solution. Alone among the brands and retailers sourcing from Menderes, Carrefour has not responded.

“Workers at Menderes Tekstil have been on the picket line for 169 days but despite our repeated approaches to Carrefour, the French retailer has remained mute”, says Mr. Kearney.

“It is high time Carrefour wakes up to the blatant violations in its supply chain and takes action to address them”, concludes Mr. Kearney.

Dismissed Union Leaders Reinstated in Peru

The Global Union representing workers in the garment, textile and leather sectors has welcomed the reinstatement of dismissed trade union leaders and activists at the San Miguel Industrial factory in Lima in Peru.

In October, two days after management at the San Miguel Industrial textile plant was notified that a union had been formed, nine union leaders and activists were told their services were no longer required. The company subsequently offered to reinstate the workers on condition

they dissolved the union. The remaining workers were warned that their short-term employment contracts would not be renewed unless they desisted from their organising efforts.

The ITGLWF intervened with the company to insist that the workers be reinstated with backpay and that the company recognise the union and establish mechanisms to ensure mature industrial relations at the workplace, and warned that it would seek the involvement of the company's buyers unless the conflict was resolved.

As the result of considerable national and international pressure, the company agreed to reinstate the dismissed workers in their previous posts and with the payment of lost wages. Negotiations are now underway on a collective agreement.

The Sindicato Textil de Trabajadores de San Miguel Industrial has thanked the ITGLWF for its intervention with the company.

“Enough Is Enough!” Fashion Brands Told

Labour rights abuses at a leading Turkish leather goods exporter, Desa, is threatening to do irreparable damage to the reputation of Turkey's export industry, trade unions across Europe claimed today. And they called on Europe's leading fashion brands and retailers to enforce their codes of conduct and insist that Desa behave responsibly towards its workforce.

During 2008, DESA fired more than forty workers after they joined the leather trade union, Deri Is. In each of the cases where the Turkish Courts have so far pronounced judgment, they have found the firings due to union membership and thus unfair and have ordered re-instatement.

After months of pressure from global and European trade unions and some of the buyers, Desa finally embarked on negotiations with Deri Is on December 19. Broad agreement appeared to be reached at that time, but five meetings later the company refuses to commit to anything in writing, is now refusing to re-instate some of those dismissed and will not accept that it must engage with Deri Is as a social partner.

Trade union patience has run out. Today, trade unions across Europe led by the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation, the European Trade Union Federation for Textiles, Clothing and Leather and their affiliates from Italy, Spain, France and the United Kingdom have called on buyers, including Prada, El Corte Ingles, Daniel Hechter, Mulberry, Jaeger and Marks and Spencer, to use the contractual obligations of their codes of conduct to force Desa to end its bad faith bargaining and reach agreement with Deri Is on re-instatement of all the dismissed workers, recognize Deri Is as the legitimate representatives of its members in the company and put in place management systems capable of ensuring long-term mature industrial relations.

Said Patrick Itschert speaking for the unions today, “Enough is enough! We kick-started negotiations on December 19. Desa gave every indication of accepting the principles of the key union demands to bring it into line with Turkish law, International Labour Standards and

the Codes of Conduct of its main buyers. A month later it is still dragging its feet with no end in sight. Prada and the other fashion buyers must now show that their codes mean something and insist that Desa fulfill its labour obligations.

“Desa’s prevarication must be ended quickly before it does irreparable damage to the reputation of the entire Turkish export industry”, concluded Mr. Itschert.

“A living wage – not wage cuts – is the route out of recession”, says Global Union

A living wage for every worker, not wage cuts for the lowest paid, is urgently needed to drive economies out of recession and stimulate global development, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank were told today.

In a meeting with leading executives of the two institutions, Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers’ Federation (ITGLWF) accused them of contributing to the current global recession through more than three decades of demanding labour deregulation and flexibility, resulting in low wages and poor working conditions and thus impeding sustainability and global development.

Said Mr. Kearney: “If labour deregulation and flexibility had been recipes for success, the global textile and clothing industry should today be booming. After all, the sectors have over the past ten years seen real wages fall by 25% and working hours increase by 25%, and this alongside a huge growth in precarious employment through short-term contract working.

“Yet, only a few months into the present recession, thousands of textile, garment and footwear factories have closed -6,000 in China alone- millions of jobs have been lost -an estimated ten million in China- and tensions are rising because often no monies are available for outstanding wages and severance payments.

“So, after years of work for poverty wages, workers are forced back to their villages with nothing. Graphic illustration that depressing wages and working conditions doesn’t promote sustainability and contributes nothing to – indeed, retards – development. Interestingly, the textile and clothing producing countries hardest hit today were the most slavish adherents to the international financial institution labour market approaches.

“The current crisis must be a wake-up call and a stimulant for change in the global financial institution approaches. No more must we hear the World Bank lecturing countries like Bangladesh to be careful about wage increases against a background of a legal minimum wage of less than 25\$ a month – absolute poverty level wages in the eyes of the United Nations.

“But change must mean more than a token nod towards decent work. It requires:

- clear commitments to effective labour regulation, with cooperation between countries and within regions;
- acceptance that a living wage, not wage cuts, is needed to stimulate development;
- a global programme of social support, including provisions for severance and other payments in the event of job losses;
- ensuring that corporate conglomerates share a liability for severance costs in the same way they share the benefits of profits across the group;

- a coordinated approach to training and retraining;
- immediate social safety net support for countries heavily dependent on labour-intensive manufacturing such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Dominican Republic and Lesotho.

Said Mr. Kearney: "Recessions are painful but they don't last forever. The IMF and the World Bank must now help ease the short-term pain but they must also work to prepare for post-recession recovery.

"The message is clear: There can be no return to business as usual. Depressing wages further, worsening working conditions and eliminating job security is not a solution. Nor will trade unions across the world accept it as such", he concluded.

Primark Mustn't Be Allowed To "Cut And Run" After Manchester Sweatshops Exposure

The scandalous and illegal working conditions in Manchester-based factories supplying clothing to UK retailers, including Primark, and exposed by the BBC and other media, are more akin to Burma or North Korea and represent the import of Third World conditions into British workplaces, the global trade union representing workers in the textile and clothing industries claimed today.

"Nothing can excuse this disgusting exploitation of vulnerable workers which is more reminiscent of 1909 rather than 2009!" said Neil Kearney, general secretary of the Brussels-based International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation. "And the three villains of the piece are the UK government for dismantling effective oversight of workplace conditions, TNS Knitwear and Fashion Waves - the two employers - for grossly exploiting and endangering the lives of their workforce and Primark and other retailers for paying their suppliers prices which preclude decent work and then ignoring the resultant sweatshop consequences including slave wages, excessive hours, dangerous working conditions and other labour scams.

"Primark claims that these two factories were audited twice in the past year and as recently as December. Missing these sweatshop conditions suggest that either the auditors were blind or Primark simply doesn't have the management capacity or the will to ensure a clean supply chain."

Continued Mr. Kearney, "Twice last year Primark cancelled orders and walked away from a number of their suppliers in India and Bangladesh exposed for abusive labour practices leaving workers the losers and in the lurch. On each occasion Primark claimed the suppliers had refused to co-operate. But, they did nothing to protect or compensate the hundreds of workers who had been abused and exploited sewing their garments.

"Primark now say they have reported TNS Knitwear and Fashion Wave to the authorities suggesting that again they want to "cut and run" and thus wash their hands of the consequences of their buying practices and their failure to police their supply chain.

"Primark need to know that "cut and run" is not an option this time. They must keep these orders in Manchester, work with TNS Knitwear and Fashion Wave to remedy the problems and ensure that every worker involved is identified and paid all the earnings, including overtime, out of which they have been cheated since taking up employment with the two

companies. In addition, they must provide support to those who may now find themselves in trouble with the authorities for stitching Primark garments.”

Mr. Kearney also called on the UK government to strengthen its oversight of factory working conditions. “Deregulation of the financial sector brought the banks to their knees. Labour deregulation has put these workers on their knees. But, these factories are not alone in mugging and endangering the lives of workforce. Effective labour and factory inspectorates are urgently needed to protect workers across the UK and root out sweatshop conditions.”

Time for Justice in the Slaying of Chea Vichea, Says Global Union

The Brussels-based International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers’ Federation has renewed its call to the Cambodian authorities for a full and independent investigation into the murder five years ago of trade union leader Chea Vichea.

Says ITGLWF General Secretary Neil Kearney: “Chea Vichea, the President of the Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia, had been actively organising garment workers and struggling to improve working conditions in the industry. He was gunned down in broad daylight on a busy street in January 2004.

“Shortly afterwards, Born Samnang and Sok Sam Oeun were convicted to twenty years imprisonment following a seriously flawed criminal investigation and a grossly unfair trial. The two men were widely believed to have been targeted as scapegoats for the murder.

Last week, the Cambodian Supreme Court ordered that the two be released on bail and that the case be sent back to the Court of Appeal to be reinvestigated.

“The denial of justice in the case of Chea Vichea has sent a chilling message to workers and trade unionists and has undermined the free exercise of trade union rights. Two other FTUWKC leaders have since been murdered and many trade unionists have been threatened or assaulted”.

“The authorities must now act quickly to find those responsible and to bring them to justice”, concludes Mr. Kearney.

Wal-Mart Must Improve Supplier Standards on Hours of Work, says Global Union

US retail giant Wal-Mart has been asked to amend the provisions of its code of conduct relating to working hours, as well as to address allegations that it is allowing its Indonesian suppliers to work up to 18 hours a week more than the legally permitted maximum.

Says Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers’ Federation: “Wal-Mart’s Standards for Suppliers allow workers employed by its suppliers to work up to 72 hours per week, or a maximum of 14 hours a day”.

“Fourteen hour work days are abusive”, says Mr. Kearney. “In addition, excessive hours make no sense for the employer as they greatly reduce productivity and diminish quality”.

“As far back as 1919, the International Labour Organisation established eight hours a day or 48 hours a week should be the limit. International standards allow an absolute maximum of 60 hours a week, but this should be on a short-term and voluntary basis when absolutely necessary”.

The Global Union has asked Wal-Mart to amend the provisions of its code of conduct in order to bring them into line with international standards.

The ITGLWF has also asked Wal-Mart to comment on allegations that it has agreed to its Indonesian suppliers working 72 hour work weeks during peak periods, despite the fact Indonesian labour law establishes a 40-hour workweek with a maximum of fourteen hours a week of voluntary overtime.

“If these allegations are true, Wal-Mart’s Indonesian suppliers are requiring employees to work 18 hours a week more than the legally permitted maximum, and the overtime work may not be voluntary as required by law”, says Mr. Kearney.

The ITGLWF has asked for assurances that if the allegations are true these practices will urgently be brought into line with national legislation.