

>>> "ITUC Press" <press@ituc-csi.org> 15.06.2007 15:00 >>>
INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

ITUC OnLine...
105/150607

Olympics Labour Rights: IOC Must Raise its Game says PlayFair 2008

Brussels, 15 June 2007 (ITUC OnLine): The International Olympic Committees' (IOC) response to Monday's report exposing severe exploitation of Chinese workers making Olympics merchandise is seriously inadequate, according to the authors of the report, PlayFair 2008*.

"The IOC has recognised that there is a problem, but they are not giving it the attention it deserves. A solution is needed not just for these four factories but for the whole of Olympics merchandise" said Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the ITUC, which is working the International Textile Garment and Leather Workers' Federation and the Clean Clothes Campaign in the PlayFair 2008 group. "After initially strongly denying any wrongdoing at all, one of the factories in the report has now admitted using child labour. This shows just how far the IOC needs to go to restore the reputation of Olympics merchandise. The IOC must take responsibility for the whole of Olympics licensing, and apply the same degree of enthusiasm to protecting workers' rights as they do to protecting the copyright of the Olympic rings", he added.

In a letter (http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Letter_to_Jacques_Rogge-14-06-07.pdf) to IOC President Jacques Rogge, the PlayFair organisations "appreciate the stated commitment to social responsibility and ethical sourcing", but have criticised the IOC for not giving any concrete information on what it is doing or what it might do in future to end labour rights violations in products bearing Olympics brands.

"The overwhelming response of the factories themselves has been one of denial" said Clean Clothes Campaign Spokesperson, Ineke Zeldenrust. It is well known that factory monitoring in the apparel and sports merchandise sector has been beset by problems of fraud and misrepresentation by employers, in China and in other producing countries. "This problem is well documented and is publicly recognised by global sporting brands", said Zeldenrust. "The PlayFair 2008 researchers who documented the abuses are experienced and competent, and interviewed the workers in a way which ensured they would not be exposed to possible intimidation or reprisals. Playfair is now concerned that BOCOG's investigation may not now be able to offer the same degree of protection and that the full picture may therefore not be revealed in these factories."

The conduct of the promised investigation by the Beijing Organizing Committee of the Olympic Games (BOCOG) is also a matter for concern, according to PlayFair. Rather than ensuring that the factories concerned respect workers rights and remedy all the violations outlined in the report, including compensating the workers for wages and entitlements they have been denied, BOCOG is threatening to cancel contracts with the four factories highlighted in the report. Other buyers are also called upon to maintain their orders and work with the factories and stakeholders, including local labour groups, to improve conditions.

"The workers in these factories have suffered enough" said Neil Kearney, General Secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation. "The IOC should not stand by and allow the Beijing Organizing Committee to simply run away from this issue. Four years have been lost since we first took this up with the IOC. Now is the time for them to sit down with us and sort the problem out."

The letter to the IOC again calls upon it to work together with the PlayFair 2008 organisations to develop and implement proposals to ensure labour rights compliance throughout all Olympics merchandise supply chains, in China and elsewhere, rather than the approach which the IOC seems to be planning to take, which is exclusively company-based and leaves no room for the workers concerned to involve trade unions and worker support groups. The problems described in the PlayFair 2008 report are common in the sector throughout the world, and by no means limited to China nor to the four factories mentioned in the report. As a global campaign network, PlayFair 2008 will continue to challenge companies, the Olympic

family and governments to make a global effort to end the exploitation and abuse of workers in sports merchandise worldwide.

* The ITUC is working with the International Textile, Leather and Garment Workers' Federation and the Clean Clothes Campaign in the PlayFair 2008 campaign.

Contacts:

www.ituc-csi.org

ph + 32 2 224 0212 or + 32 476 621 018 or +32 475 670 833

www.itglwf.org

ph + 32 2 512 2606 or + 32 2 512 2833

www.cleanclothes.org

ph + 31 20 4122785 or + 31 651 280 210

PlayFair 2008 website

www.playfair2008.org

Founded on 1 November 2006, the ITUC represents 168 million workers in 153 countries and territories and has 304 national affiliates.

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For more information, please contact the ITUC Press Department on +32 2 224 0204 or +32 476 621 018.

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