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Play Fair Torchbearers confront IOC on Labor Rights violations

First contacted in 2003, IOC only beginning to talk of possible changes in 2016; Lack of urgency a disgrace to the Olympics movement, say Play Fair coordinators

Lausanne, 10 June 2008 (ITUC OnLine): Play Fair 2008 activists were at the International Olympic Committee's headquarters today to press Jacques Rogge, head of the Olympic movement's top organization to take long overdue action on the problem of labour rights violations where Olympic merchandise is produced.

"The IOC has had years to consider these issues yet continues to delay - their response to the labor rights crisis in the production of Olympic goods is inadequate and risks tarnishing the reputation of the Olympic Movement," said Esther de Haan, in Switzerland today to hand over the signatures of more than 12,000 people from 99 countries worldwide who participated in Play Fair's alternative Olympic torch relay to carry a labour rights message to the IOC.

In March Play Fair campaigners launched the "Catch the Flame" initiative to draw attention to the IOC's persistent failure to take responsibility for working conditions in Olympic supply chains. The action mobilized "torchbearers", beginning in the Netherlands where the first Olympic flame was lit, to sign onto a message to the IOC, spreading the virtual flame's message globally via Bluetooth, SMS and e-mail. The alternative flame reached China on May 1st.

"The messages of concern from those who've signed onto Catch the Flame show that people from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe are joined in their belief that the IOC has to take action on these issues immediately," said Neil Kearney, general secretary of the International Textile Garment and Leather Workers Federation. "Like any other brand-name company the IOC has to take supply chain responsibility, without doing so the five rings is on its way to becoming a symbol for the repression of workers fundamental rights."

First contacted in 2003, the IOC has still produced no concrete plan to deal with the pressing issues of poverty wages, excessive overtime, health and safety violations and union repression in the workplaces where Olympic products are produced. Play Fair understands that the IOC will include some reference to ethical supply chain issues in selecting the host city for 2016 Games, however, no detail is available on this, or indeed any substantial IOC action around the Vancouver, London or Sochi Olympics in the coming 8 years.

"We have spelled out our proposals to the IOC clearly, but we're still waiting for them to start a real discussion on implementing changes to end the exploitation of sports merchandise workers" said Guy Ryder, the ITUC General Secretary, one of the co-organizers of the Play Fair campaign.

Play Fair's June 2007 research report on working conditions at Olympic suppliers in China detailed some of the problems faced by women and men making Olympic products. Today activists also visited the Olympic Museum in Lausanne to offer Play Fair's contribution to the current exhibition on Beijing 2008 and China. As with the IOC, the Beijing Organizing Committee of the Olympic Games (BOCOG) response to Play Fair's report was insufficient. For more information see below.

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PHOTOS

High resolution photos of today's action are downloadable from:
<http://www.playfair2008.org/photos/>

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Play Fair 2008 research report on working conditions in factories producing Olympic logo goods:

http://www.playfair2008.org/docs/playfair_2008-report.pdf

For an update on the four Chinese factories profiled, see:

http://www.playfair2008.org/docs/Prodction_of_Olympics_sponsored_goods.pdf

For additional info, see www.playfair2008.org and www.catchtheflame.org

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The ITUC represents 168 million workers in 155 countries and territories and has 311 national affiliates. Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org>

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