

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

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Unfortunately, Olympic skiers aren't the only ones in a race to the bottom...

Brussels, 13 January 2010 (ITUC OnLine): In the run-up to the February Vancouver Winter Olympic Games, an international coalition of worker rights organisations is releasing its rating of commitments made by major sportswear brands to eliminate sweatshop abuses in their global supply chains. The ratings are based on the responses of the sportswear companies, including Nike, adidas, Puma and others, to a series of demands put forward by the coalition on the eve of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

The coalition, which includes Canada's Maquila Solidarity Network, the International Trade Union Confederation, the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation, and the European Clean Clothes Campaign is also posting a series of web ads accusing the brands that profit off the Olympics of engaging in a "race to the bottom" on wages and working conditions.

The campaign is asking organisations and individuals to send letters to the sportswear brands, telling them, "It's time to up your game and start clearing the hurdles for workers' rights".

"Since the Beijing Olympics, sportswear brands have barely moved to overcome four major hurdles blocking improvements on wages and working conditions, with the result that workers rights in this industry are on a downhill slide," said Lynda Yanz, executive director of the Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN), a Toronto-based women's and labour rights organisation that developed the ads.

"Sportswear workers around the globe are expected to work extended hours under intense pressure and yet often earn less than a dollar a day," says Jeroen Merk of the Clean Clothes Campaign. "Many are facing precarious working arrangements, threats of factory closures, overwhelming obstacles to their right to unionise, and poverty wages."

"Many sportswear brands talk a good game," says Patrick Itschert, general secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation. "They say they want to uphold core labour standards in the factories producing Olympic-branded goods, but they aren't willing to take the critical steps to create decent work throughout their supply chain. The goal of our campaign is to make them measure up."

The company ratings and ads can be found on a new website of the Play Fair Coalition at: www.clearingthehurdles.org.

The first ad, which features a montage of skiers and sweatshop workers, says: "Unfortunately, the Winter Olympics aren't the only place we're seeing a race to the bottom. Sportswear companies are also in a race to the bottom ... on wages and working conditions." New ads with a variety of similar messages will be launched every ten days in the run-up to the Olympics.

The ad campaign is running on dozens of websites in British Columbia, Canada and globally, including the BC Federation of Labour, the BC Teacher's Federation, Oxfam, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Auto Workers, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the International Trade Union Confederation, the European Clean Clothes Campaign and more.

"Sporting authorities, including the International Olympic Committee and the authorities for individual sports, must make it compulsory that products which carry their logos are produced in decent conditions, with full respect for the rights of the workers making the products," said International Trade Union Confederation General Secretary Guy Ryder.

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