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World Cup Soccer Balls: Exploitation Still the Norm Report reveals Child Labour, Poverty Wages, Temporary Workers

Brussels, 7 June 2010 (ITUC OnLine): As the frenzy grows over the upcoming FIFA World Cup in South Africa, there is a part of the World Cup that won't be broadcast on TV. The Play Fair Alliance today asked FIFA to respond to the report "Missed the Goal for Workers: the Reality of Soccer Ball Stitchers", released by US-based NGO International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF) on 7 June. The report reveals that workers stitching soccer balls in Pakistan, India, China and Thailand continue to experience alarming labour rights violations. The research found that child labour still exists in the Pakistani industry and is also occurring in India and China.

In the 13 years since the soccer ball industry signed the "Atlanta Agreement" committing to clean up the industry, regular reports of violations of human rights in soccer ball production have been brought to the attention of key actors in the industry including global brands and FIFA. Most recently, in 2008, the Play Fair Alliance, which consists of the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation (ITGLWF), published research on China, India and Thailand, where workers reported wages below the legal minimum despite working 12-13 hours a day. Home-based workers in India reported piece rates as low as US\$0.35 per ball, completing two to four balls a day.

"It is shocking that after all of these years, low wages and other labour rights violations are still the norm and not the exception in the industry," commented Ineke Zeldenrust from the Clean Clothes Campaign. "As fans worldwide get excited about the games, the public expects FIFA and the soccer ball industry to finally live up to its promises."

"The ITUC has invited FIFA today to discuss concrete measures that can be taken to clean up the industry. It is a scandal that so many workers are subjected to appalling exploitation in an industry that generates so much wealth, and we are looking to FIFA to take the lead in ensuring a fair deal for these workers," said ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder.

Other problems highlighted in the report are gender discrimination against female home-based workers, who are paid the least and face constant threat of losing their jobs due to pregnancy; overlong working hours as in one Chinese factory, where workers were found to work as many as 21 hours a day without a day off for an entire month; and lack of proper drinking water or medical care facilities, and even toilets, as found in Indian stitching centers.

"These conditions are absolutely unacceptable" said Patrick Itschert, general secretary of the ITGLWF. "FIFA must take concrete steps to ensure that the human rights of all those engaged in producing soccer balls are respected."

The Play Fair Alliance calls on FIFA and the soccer ball industry to take immediate action to address the issues of extremely low wages, proliferation of temporary workers, and a lack of

civil society engagement in working to improve conditions for the very workers that produce the ball at the center of the World Cup 2010 games.

The Global Union for Construction Workers, the BWI, has also been in dialogue with FIFA, to enlist its support for better rights and conditions for workers building and renovating venues used international tournaments.

“We have had to issue FIFA a yellow card on this, since workers building the stadiums where these tournaments are held are not getting a fair deal either,” said BWI General Secretary Ambet Yuson.

The report is available at:

http://cleanclothes.org/documents/ILRF_soccerball_report.pdf

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Notes to the editor:

- In April 2008, Play Fair 2008 issued the report, “Clearing the Hurdles: Steps to improving working conditions in the global sportswear industry”, revealing that violations of worker rights is still the sportswear industry norm and outlining steps to improve working conditions. Report at www.playfair2008.org/docs/Clearing_the_Hurdles.pdf
- To read the ITUC letter to FIFA: [add weblink]
- The Play Fair Alliance 2008 consists of the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), and the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation (ITGLWF). Play Fair organisations have been campaigning since 2003 to commit Olympic organisations and the sportswear industry to take responsibility for ensuring workers’ rights in their supply chains. More at <http://playfair2008.org>
- A public appeal asking FIFA to clean up the soccer ball industry was released by CCC and can be accessed at: <http://www.cleanclothes.org/>
- More on the BWI campaign at: <http://www.bwint.org/default.asp?Language=EN>
- International Labor Rights Forum is an advocacy organisation dedicated to achieving just and humane treatment for workers worldwide. ILRF works to stop child labour, promote and protect the rights of working women, end sweatshop labour, and to end violence against trade unions. ILRF has worked on labour-rights issues and specifically the prevalence of child labour in the soccer ball industry since 1996. More at www.laborrights.org .

The ITUC represents 176 million workers in 155 countries and territories and has 312 national affiliates.

<http://www.ituc-csi.org> and <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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