

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

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ITUC Condemns IKEA Anti-union Discrimination Practices in USA

Brussels, 27 April 2011 (ITUC OnLine): As a follow-up to its meetings on multinationals held in Washington D.C., the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) representing 175 million workers in 151 countries and territories is alarmed at the delay of responsibility of the furniture giant IKEA regarding the anti-union discrimination practices in Danville, Virginia, USA. Some of the Virginia plant's 335 workers working for IKEA's industrial group Swedwood are trying to form a union, and workers are not allowed to join the union of their choice.

“Clearly all is not well at this factory, which a few years ago was opened by IKEA’s subsidiary Swedwood, in Danville, Virginia in the USA. IKEA is taking advantage of the lax US workers’ protection,” said ITUC general secretary Sharan Burrow. “It is not too much to ask of the furniture giant IKEA, which has reported around three billion dollars in profit, and 31 billion dollars in sales, to allow 335 workers in one factory the opportunity to hear and decide for themselves. We’re simply asking the company to open its doors and allow the union the opportunity to educate these workers about their rights guaranteed by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). If these workers wish to be represented by the IAM, then the company must negotiate a collective agreement . The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers requested this last year when they announced that a majority of eligible employees had signed cards authorizing the IAM to be their exclusive representative.”

The workers in the plant work hard every day under difficult conditions to produce such IKEA items as LACK, BILLY, FAKTUM, PAX, EXPEDIT, EFFEKTIV among others for sale in IKEA stores worldwide. In response, to the workers efforts to form a union, the factory hired a law firm, which has made its reputation keeping unions out of companies and helping employers interfere with and obstruct workers' freedom of association.

There appears to be ongoing safety problems at the factory. In response to a complaint filed by the Machinists Union, the local health and safety authority found Swedwood guilty of violating the law on several counts. The resulting changes and fines for violations of the safety laws have helped improve conditions inside. Yet, serious injuries continue to occur. Workers have reported that they have been dismissed just for saying they would welcome joining a union to protect their rights. Swedwood has already settled with two workers who filed complaints of discharge based on racial discrimination.

Beloved by consumers worldwide for its affordable furniture, the articles on the Danville case published in the last months both in the US and Swedish press are affecting the Swedish furniture giant, which always had a very good image worldwide. Now IKEA could improve its international reputation by simply ensuring that the fundamental rights of its workers everywhere are respected including in the USA.

The ITUC is joining this struggle for justice in Danville and has allocated substantial financial resources to make sure that this company acts responsibly in the USA. IKEA has to respect

the international framework agreement signed in 1998 which guarantees organizing and collective bargaining rights to all its employees in every country.

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 151 countries and territories and has 305 national affiliates. Website: <http://www.ituc-csi.org> and <http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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