Indian supplier of Euro/US Brands Gags Rights Activists Clean Clothes Campaign & India Committee of the Netherlands ■ Court denies Indian labour organizations right to speak about working conditions in garment factory
For immediate release
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The court of the City Civil Judge at Bangalore ruled today to impose a restraining order on five Indian labour organizations that had spoken out about problems at a garment factory producing for top European and US brands, the Clean Clothes Campaign and the India Committee of the Netherlands report today.

A temporary restraining order had already been in place since 28 July 2006, when the owner of the Fibres and Fabrics International (FFI) and Jeans Knit (JKPL) factories sought to legally silence the Garment and Textile Workers' Union (GATWU), Women Garment Workers Front (Munnade), Civil Initiatives for Development and Peace (CIVIDEP), New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI), and Clean Clothes Campaign Task Force in India from sharing information on rights violations at FFI.

Since May 2006 the Clean Clothes Campaign and the India Committee of the Netherlands have publicly supported the workers and labour organisations to improve the labour conditions and labour relations at FFI and JKPL. FFI, producing for international brand name companies, including Ann Taylor, Armani, Gap, G-Star, Guess, Mexx, and RaRe, has a history of workers' rights violations. Workers´ testimonies collected by the local trade union GATWU document wide-ranging violations of workers´ rights and human rights in the FFI and JKPL production units during 2005 and 2006. The violations included harassment and abuse of workers, arbitrary termination of services without following due legal process, and absence of proper safety measures. An independent fact-finding committee consisting of local human rights organisations and social activists has backed up these claims.

The restraining order issued today is a heavy blow to the fundamental right to freedom of speech and freedom of association in India. "Instead of engaging in a constructive dialogue with the local organizations to resolve the outstanding problems, FFI management went to court to silence them," said Esther de Haan, coordinator of the CCC International Secretariat. "At the same time the intimidation of FFI workers continued, with some workers being forced to resign. Continuously workers are reminded that their organizing is not going to be accepted by their bosses".

This order is preventing workers' organizations from reporting violations of workers' rights. Ashim Roy, President of GATWU and General Secretary of NTUI believes that "the grounds for constraining our freedom of expression are not proper and reasonable, and not consistent with the constitution, and its interpretations given by the Supreme Court of this country with respect to the freedom of expression. In deference to the judiciary, we will abide by this order but shall immediately appeal against it in the High Court of Karnataka." "The union has always stood for negotiated settlement of issues and

even now suggest to FFI/JKPL to engage in dialogue with workers' organisations to resolve issues" said Jayaram, vice-president of GATWU.

In January FFI also threatened to take legal action against Dutch organizations working on this case. The Clean Clothes Campaign and the India Committee of the Netherlands continue to call for FFI to enter into a mediated dialogue with the Indian organizations to resolve the problems at the factory. The CCC is in an ongoing dialogue with FFI/JKPL's clients about their role in resolving rights violations at their supplier.

For more information on FFI/JKPL, see
http://www.cleanclothes.org/urgent/07-01-10.htm