March 2010

News Flash: Vote Now for your Worker Rights Hero!

After receiving dozens of nominations, we're excited to open up voting for SFC's Worker Rights Hero. **Please vote now for the finalist you believe best embodies the spirit of SweatFree Communities, and consider donating to SFC's new SweatFree Sustainers program.** The winning Hero will become the namesake of this new program designed to build SFC's grassroots future, and we will feature her or his inspiring life story in our work and publications. Thanks to everyone who nominated a Hero, and to our board members and staff who selected the finalists. Of course, all of our nominees and finalists are heroes in our book. Cast your vote now.

Please also support our new SweatFree Sustainers program by signing up today as a small monthly donor. For as little as $10 per month you too can become a Hero to the sweatfree movement. Small (or big!) monthly donors give SFC the diverse, reliable, and ongoing support we need from grassroots supporters at a time when foundations are cutting back across the board. Please vote for your Hero and honor your vote with a donation to SweatFree Communities today. Thank you for the many ways you support our work!

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Thousands respond to Bangladesh factory fires - Send an email to H&M

After the recent tragic fire at the Garib & Garib Sweater Factory in Bangladesh, which claimed the lives of 21 trapped workers who could not escape because exits were locked or blocked with debris, no less than 1,500 ILRF and SFC supporters contacted the Swedish fashion giant H&M, the main buyer at the factory, expressing concern and demanding change.

Please **add your name to the list of supporters by sending an email to H&M** through our Take Action page. Thank you to those who have already participated for taking action so quickly. Worldwide more than 6,000 people sent a clear message that authorities and companies have to take immediate action to support the workers and prevent future disasters.

The Garib & Garib fire was not the first in the Bangladeshi garment industry and, tragically, it is no longer even the last one. Just last week a fluorescent light exploded at the Matrix sweater factory, causing a cloud of smoke. When the fire alarm went off, workers panicked and fled the

building crushing one woman and injuring 25 in the ensuing chaos. Early reports from police say that there were no emergency exits and that stairways were blocked with cartons.

The fires highlight the need for structural change in the industry. "I strongly believe that if you are really serious about preventing future deaths you must immediately start involving workers in monitoring health and safety standards," said Mr. Amirul Haq Amin of the National Garment Workers Federation. "This can only be done through supporting the right to organise and working directly with trade unions."

Please email H&M and other stakeholders in the Garib & Garib fire now, calling upon the brands, the employer and the government of Bangladesh to take immediate action to ensure justice for the victims, and to prevent these tragedies from occurring in the future.

Spring worker tour approaches... a city near you?

Would you like to hear first-hand about the workers' struggles in Bangladesh and Pakistan and how you can take action for worker justice? You are in luck if you live near one of the 15 cities, from Minneapolis to Washington DC to Maine, that our Sweatshop Workers Speak Out worker tour will visit during 18 days at the end of April.

Featuring two dynamic worker rights leaders, Kalpona Akter from Bangladesh and Zehra Bano from Pakistan, the tour aims to build solidarity between U.S. communities and workers that make goods for our government agencies. Each tour event will help ignite a new sweatfree campaign or bring an active campaign to the next level. Thanks so much to local organizers who are organizing so many creative events, such as a City Council hearing in Pittsburgh, a May Day celebration in Washington DC, meetings with Hugo Boss workers in Cleveland, and briefings with state government officials in Ohio and Maine and Congressional offices in DC. Many university campus events are also on tap.

To see the full tour schedule, or to learn more, please visit the tour webpage or contact tour organizer Trina Tocco at trina.tocco@ilrf.org. Please also help us spread the word by inviting your friends!

New report: Contracting that Works - An Action Toolkit for State and Local Governments; plus more coverage of SFC

Our friends at the Center for American Progress Action Fund and the National Employment Law Project have released a new report on public contracting practices that works for workers, taxpayers, and governments. Sweatfree purchasing and the Sweatfree Purchasing

Putting it into Practice:
The Sweatfee Purchasing Consortium continues to grow and develop, now with nine dues-paying members. **Can you work to get**

Consortium are among the models highlighted in the user-friendly toolkit. You can download a copy of the full report here.

your city or state to be the next member and help to create real teeth in sweatfree purchasing? To get involved contact organize@sweatfree.org.

According to *Contracting that Works*, state and local governments finance millions of jobs across our economy with the hundreds of billions of dollars they spend each year to purchase goods and services. Yet jobs created through government contracting are often substandard, paying very low wages and involving poor working conditions where employment law violations are common. Such jobs not only hurt America's workers; they also undermine the quality of goods and services delivered to government agencies and the public, and often result in significant hidden costs for taxpayers.

Contracting that Works: An Action Toolkit for State and Local Governments outlines reforms that can improve the quality of the jobs generated by government contracting and supplements other contracting reform blueprints that chiefly focus on improving transparency and accountability. The key strategies inventoried in the toolkit are:

- Careful review of decisions to contract out
- Prescreening contractors for responsibility
- High standards for wages and benefits
- Incentives to raise wages and benefits above the legal floor
- Strong post-award enforcement
- Increased data collection and transparency

Download a copy of the full report here.

We were also happy to see additional coverage of SweatFree Communities and the anti-sweatshop movement in major academic and policy journals, in addition to news media, during the month of March:

- *American Economic Review*: Multinationals and Anti-sweatshop Activism
- *Policy Innovations*: Public Procurement with a Conscience
- *Sacramento Bee*: Fair trade labeling isn't cut-and-dried

Newest sweatfree campaign takes Houston by storm

Let's give a warm welcome to the newest member of the SweatFree community: the Sweat Free Houston campaign! Sweat Free Houston (SFH) reports that the campaign kicked off in January 2010 under the leadership of Timothy J. O'Brien, founder of award winning University of Houston Students against Sweatshops, and Ross Barnard, co-founder of nationally award winning UH Students for Fair Trade. SFH has already attracted more than 80 organizations endorsing the demand that the city stops buying garments made in sweatshops. A recent benefit concert helped raise money and get the word out about their mission and goals.

To learn more about Sweat Free Houston and the great work they are doing please visit www.sweatfreehouston.wordpress.com. Welcome aboard Houston!

Look for SFC and partners at the U.S. Social Forum

If you've been considering a trip out to Detroit for the U.S. Social Forum (June 22-26, 2010), we encourage you to come! In addition to dozens of amazing issue- and skills-based workshops, there's no better opportunity to connect with so many like-minded progressive activists and movement-builders in the U.S. And, of course SweatFree Communities will be there!

We've got a great workshop planned with allies from across the movement for economic justice. Titled "What makes a successful international labor solidarity campaign?," our workshop brings together leaders from Jobs with Justice, Service Employees International Union, Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility, and International

Labor Rights Forum to identify what has worked, what hasn't, and what we've learned from some of the most dynamic worker rights campaigns out there. We'll also host a reception for sweatfree activists and allies during the week at a time and place TBA. Get more info on the USSF here, and let us know if you're thinking of coming by dropping us a line at organize@sweatfree.org.