Published on *International Labor Rights Forum* (http://www.laborrights.org)

Super Bowl Halftime Sponsor Bridgestone Firestone Continues to Exploit Workers in Liberia

Date of publication: January 29, 2009

Source: ILRF Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 29, 2009

CONTACT: Tim Newman, tim.newman@ilrf.org [1], 617-823-9464 or 202-347-4100 ext. 113

This Sunday, millions of sports fans around the world will watch this year's National Football League (NFL) Super Bowl Halftime show sponsored by Bridgestone and featuring Bruce Springsteen. Meanwhile, the halftime show's title sponsor will continue its long history of exploitation of workers and the environment in Liberia.

Since 1926, Bridgestone Firestone has operated the world's largest rubber plantation in Harbel, Liberia. Workers on the plantation have long faced incredibly poor living and working conditions. Firestone rubber tappers live in crowded shacks without running water, electricity or indoor toilets and are required to meet an unreasonably high production quota in order to receive their meager pay.

After a long struggle, workers finally held the first free and fair union election and signed their first contract negotiated by a democratically elected and independent union leadership in August 2008. The agreement was a major step forward in the long struggle of workers to protect their rights. However, since the time the agreement was signed, Firestone management has failed to implement many of the important improvements in the new contract. For example, the new contract reduced the size of the production quota, but many workers throughout the plantation report that they are still being forced to produce at the old quota level which means they must hire subcontractors or use the labor of their family members in order to finish their work and be paid. Firestone has also not fully implemented health and safety improvements in the new contract and has not provided transportation which leaves workers as beasts of burden carrying 150 pounds of rubber on their backs. The new contract also mandated improved conditions for children, including transportation to school; yet Firestone has neglected these provisions almost entirely.

Bama Athreya, Executive Director of the International Labor Rights Forum, said, "Bridgestone Firestone needs to stop playing games with workers and their families in Liberia. The halftime show sponsor should immediately honor its commitments in the historic contract signed with the workers in Liberia and the NFL should refuse to renew any contracts with Bridgestone until they can play fair in Liberia."

Emira Woods, Co- Director of Foreign Policy In Focus at the Institute for Policy Studies, said, "Bridgestone Firestone spends millions to sponsor the Super Bowl yet a small fraction of that amount could alleviate the heavy burden of exploitation of workers and the environment in Liberia. After 3 years of

pressure from the workers, the adjacent community, and government officials, it is past time for Firestone to do the right thing. The NFL has a responsibility to sports fans across the country to not mire its marquee event with endorsers like Firestone that also sponsor labor and environmental abuse around the world."

Robert Nyahn, Program Officer of Save My Future Foundation-Liberia, said, "If Bridgestone Firestone could stop spending money to fake its public relation and spend half of that money to provide basic social services for its employees and respect their rights, that would be one the best public relations campaigns and one that we would all support. Unfortunately, they chose to sponsor the Super Bowl Halftime show as a clear deception to the sports fan and a disservice to the ill-treated 'slave-like' employees in Liberia."

Concerned sports fans are being encouraged to participate in an e-mail action campaign targeting NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell and Bridgestone Americas CEO Mark Emkes: http://www.unionvoice.org/campaign/NFL09 [2]

For more information about the Stop Firestone campaign, please visit www.StopFirestone.org.

###

Source URL: http://www.laborrights.org/stop-child-labor/stop-firestone/news/11808

Links:
[1] mailto:tim.newman@ilrf.org
[2] http://www.unionvoice.org/campaign/NFL09