

INTERNATIONAL LABOR RIGHTS FORUM **& GLOBAL EXCHANGE**

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Child Labor Continues in the Apparel Industry

An article in *The Observer* just caught GAP Inc. with child labor in one of their subcontracted facilities in India. Today the International Labor Rights Forum and Global Exchange demand an end to child labor in the global garment industry.

Child labor continues in the 21st century as companies have shifted around the world where cheap labor thrives. Sub-contracting is rife in the global apparel industry, as are a range of labor abuses, not just child labor. Companies must do more to end child labor and other gross labor violations throughout their supply chains. Over the last ten years, there has been a massive influx of voluntary initiatives which have done nothing more than confirm what was already known. Furthermore, companies continue to fall short on identifying the root causes of labor rights violations throughout the supply chains.

Chie Abad of Global Exchange said, “As a former sweatshop worker for the GAP, I can say firsthand that it is unacceptable and, sadly, unsurprising that children are being forced to work in sweatshops so that the GAP can sell cheap clothing. GAP is responsible for the entire supply chain of their garments, and for ensuring that their sub-contractors are not employing child labor or paying poverty wages—that is the price of doing business. It is time companies made real commitments to change their business model so that the root problems are corrected.” Chie Abad spent six years on the Pacific island of Saipan, a U.S. Territory, as a garment worker for the Sako Corporation, which made clothes for the Gap and other retailers.

Inspections and punishments may have increased since the 1990s, but these are after-the-fact measures. ILRF and Global Exchange call upon the GAP and others to go further than detecting problems. At this point the problems are well documented. What is needed is a fundamental shift in the industry.

Trina Tocco of the International Labor Rights Forum said, “It is a shame that companies continue to work with a system they know is flawed. In a system where the lowest bidder wins, its no wonder that child labor would be used in order to cut costs. It’s time for companies like GAP to step up to the plate and develop a new system where labor rights are just as important as producing cheaper goods.”

Buying policies are inseparable from labor policies. Making suppliers compete for low prices and then slapping on codes of conduct and inspections is contradictory. It yields these sorts of stories.

Child labor is simply unacceptable in today's world full of technology and transparency.

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