



Statement on Artigas worker protest, now in its fifth week

Thursday, July 9, 2015
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW YORK - Since June 8, hundreds of workers of Shenzhen Artigas Clothing and Leatherware factory, a major contract manufacturer to Uniqlo, have been demanding collective negotiation with management over unpaid compensation and other terms related to factory relocation. Management has continually failed to come to a fair resolution with workers through collective negotiation, leading to ongoing hardship for the workers of Artigas. China Labor Watch (CLW) calls on Uniqlo to live up to its commitments use its influence as a major buyer to demand that Artigas management hold collective negotiations with workers until an agreement is reached.

Initially, after Artigas made preparations to relocate operations, Artigas workers, most of whom are women, went on strike to protest unpaid remuneration and contract revision compensation in the face of the impending move. Workers occupied the production workshop to prevent management from relocating equipment. (A CLW summary of events up to June 25 can be [found here](#).)

After three weeks of protest and refusal of management to negotiate, on July 1 workers finally secured a meeting between worker representatives and management representatives. In this first meeting, the factory management refused to meet workers' demands and further instructed workers that they should negotiate one-on-one with factory management.

Facing recalcitrant management, workers eventually took their demands to the Guangdong Provincial Government in Guangzhou City. On July 6, the petitioning workers were forced by public security to leave the provincial government building, transported on a bus back to Shenzhen, where they were then detained by police on Monday evening and released on Tuesday. Having removed equipment from the workshop, Artigas management proceeded to cut off utilities on July 7.

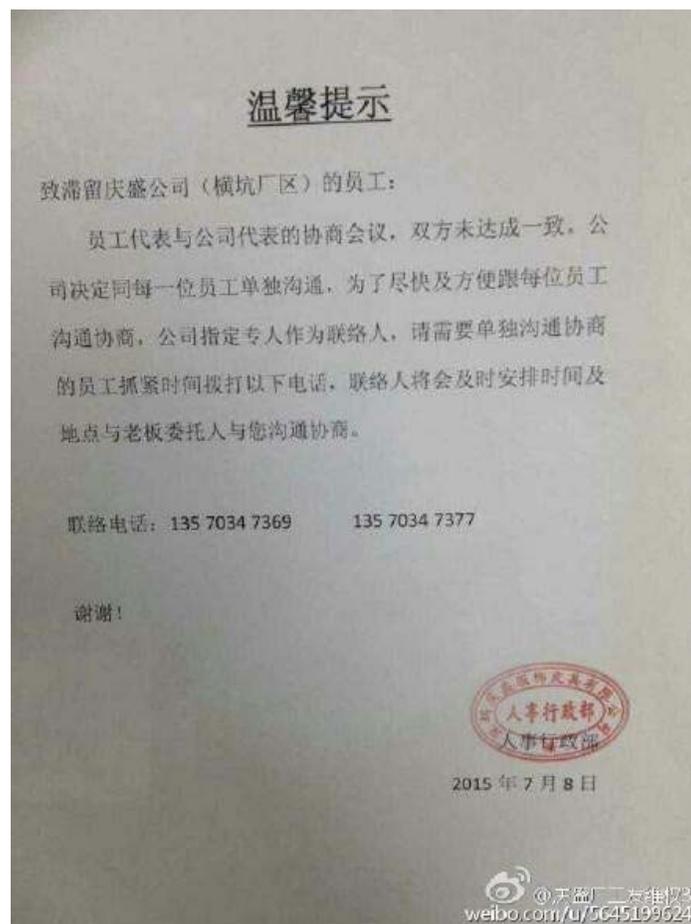
While petitioning the government in Guangzhou on July 2, workers posted the following on a Sina Weibo:

"While legally defending our rights over the past 25 days, we Artigas workers have been bullied and suppressed. We have no channel to express our grievances, sadness, and desperation. Without any money or power, we have to sleep on the street at night like beggars when we petition [the government]. We really wish someone could help us, the petitioning workers from Artigas. We really need help!"



Artigas workers petitioning

From the beginning of this month-long struggle, workers have maintained the same demands (articulated by workers in a [June 21 letter](#)): demanding their legal rights to owed remuneration and fair compensation through collective bargaining. Despite this clear demand, on July 8, Artigas management delivered a disappointing response, rejecting collective negotiation and again demanding one-on-one negotiation with workers (translation of one notice below):



July 8 notice to workers from Artigas management

Translation of Artigas notice (July 8):

<p>A Friendly Notice</p> <p>To the workers of Artigas (Hengkeng Production Area):</p> <p>Because no agreement was reached in the negotiation meeting between the workers' representatives and the factory management's representatives, the factory management has decided to communicate separately with each worker. In order to have the communication and negotiation done as early and conveniently as possible, the management has specifically assigned a contact person for workers. For those who intend to negotiate individually, please call the following phone numbers immediately. The contact will arrange with you a time and place for your negotiation with a representative of the factory management.</p> <p>Phone number: 135 7034 7369 / 135 7034 7377</p> <p>Thank you!</p> <p>The Department of Human Resources and Administration</p> <p>July 8, 2015</p>

Workers' disappointment and anger with this response from management can be sensed in corresponding July 8 comment on workers'

Weibo account:

"In petitioning from the district to the municipal government, and then to provincial government, what [Artigas] workers have always demanded is a collective bargaining with the boss. Some departments have expressed that they would provide us with a platform on which to conduct collective bargaining. Yet the management of the factory still blatantly demands negotiating with each individual worker and keeps posting endless notices about it. They are completely deceiving the government and fooling with the workers!"

This divide-and-conquer tactic aims to prevent workers from using their collective power to achieve fair resolution for their demands: compensation for unpaid pensions, overtime pay, high-temperature allowances, annual paid leave, and contract revision compensation.

Uniqlo is a major client of Artigas factory. In June, Uniqlo's parent company, Fast Retailing, released a statement on the worker action, claiming, "At Fast Retailing, ensuring human rights and appropriate working conditions are of the utmost importance." The International Covenant on Economic, Cultural, and Social Rights (Articles 8 and 9) establishes the rights to remuneration for work and social security, both of which have been denied to Artigas workers. Furthermore, under Chinese labor law, workers have a right to a pension, overtime pay, paid annual leave, and compensation for contract revision.

It is reprehensible that workers who have made Uniqlo's products for years are being treated this way. If Uniqlo and Fast Retailing want to make good on its social commitments, they should demand that Artigas negotiate with workers collectively over the issues workers have raised and come to a fair resolution as soon as possible.



Workers were transported on a bus by police to Shenzhen before being arrested



Police cars escort the bus on which the workers were transported



Artigas workers meet with management on July 1 (1)



Artigas workers meet with management on July 1 (2)



Artigas workers striking in June 2015

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