Agreement Reached with Forever 21
December 2004

Forever 21, Inc., the Garment Worker Center, Sweatshop Watch, and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, on behalf of several Los Angeles garment workers represented by it, have reached an agreement to resolve all litigation between them. In addition, the parties have agreed to take steps to promote greater worker protection in the local garment industry. The parties are pleased to announce the resolution of this matter as a positive and symbolic step forward in demonstrating respect and appreciation for garment workers. Under the parties’ agreement, the national boycott of Forever 21 and related protests at the Company’s retail stores, initiated by the Garment Worker Center in 2001, have ended. The parties share a belief that garment workers should labor in lawful conditions and should be treated fairly and with dignity. Forever 21, the Garment Worker Center and Sweatshop Watch all remain committed to ensuring that the clothing Forever 21 sells in its stores is made under lawful conditions.
The fourth annual World Social Forum in Mumbai, India provided amazing opportunities for activists, including Sweatshop Watch and Garment Worker Center, to connect on various levels towards building the global peace and justice movement. The learning of local struggles, energy gained from each others’ presence, and connection of issues across borders provided much ammunition in the fight against corporate globalization and imperialism.

The World Social Forum (WSF) began in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001 as a space to debate and discuss alternatives to globalization as defined by corporations. Uniting under the banner “Another World is Possible,” WSF grew out of the need to bring together alternative economic development models and resistances to corporate globalization at the same global scale at which corporations and international institutions operate. Many in the anti-globalization struggle view corporate globalization as another form of imperialism where the rich and powerful elites in the Global North unfairly exploit resources and labor from the Global South, thus disabling the South’s independent development. Instead, development is defined and dependent on rich industrialized nations’ standards and justified by global institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), World Bank, and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Like imperialism of the Nineteenth Century, today’s globalization is the industrialized nations’ quest to ensure profit and access to Third World resources, regardless of the rights and needs of the local people who suffer most: the working poor, indigenous populations, women, and ethnic minorities. The World Social Forum recognizes this violent history and works to stop its continuation. Symbolically, it is held roughly at the same time as the World Economic Forum, which brings together top corporate representatives and world political leaders in a closed-door “summit” to determine global economic policies that largely favor the wealthy.

WSF Mumbai drew over 100,000 participants from 152 countries with over 300 self-organized seminars about women’s rights, disability rights, water rights, labor, and dalit (“untouchable”) rights, as well as large marches against American imperialism and the war in Iraq and Palestinian occupation. This was the first time WSF was held outside of Brazil, and Mumbai’s WSF had large South Asian contingents, allowing many who could not travel to South America for previous Forums to participate in this one.

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Strong presence of garment workers and advocates

Amidst the plethora of workshops, activities, and cultural performances, there was also a strong presence of garment worker issues. The need for more communication among advocates is important given the global nature of the garment industry, but is especially pressing due to the coming phase-out of the Multi-Fiber Arrangement (MFA) by 2005. The elimination of garment and textile quotas will most likely lead to job loss in many countries, since garment and textile manufacturing will move to a few countries with the cheapest labor and weakest labor law enforcement. Based on the model of free trade, the MFA phase-out will further depress wages and worsen working conditions: country will be pit against country and worker against worker in the race to the bottom to attract garment production.

The WSF was the place to hear and share garment workers' stories from Thailand to the U.S., and jointly consider ways to build the global anti-sweatshop movement. Particularly since the corporations and governments of the Industrialized North push free trade policies, Sweatshop Watch plays a key role in pressuring the U.S. government, educating American consumers, and holding U.S. corporations accountable. Although key international strategies did not emerge, the connections and relationship-building to move forward on possible global campaigns did.

Pressures of globalization are already being felt in the garment industry. In fact, garment workers in the U.S. and developing countries share many similar experiences, from poor working conditions to factory closures. According to the Free Trade Zone Workers Union of Sri Lanka, 46 factories closed down in Sri Lanka last year, leaving 26,000 workers jobless; 150,000 more workers are predicted to lose their employment. Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan government has been weakening labor laws to attract investors by extending allowable overtime hours and giving employers more flexibility in dismissing workers. Similar efforts to water down labor laws are occurring in India and Bangladesh. Compensation for garment workers who lose their jobs due to the MFA phase-out emerged as a common demand by activists from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Thailand. They view compensation as the duty of the government and multi-national corporations, who must take responsibility and not leave workers without a safety net. South Asian NGOs and unions are also exploring campaigns to demand a regional living wage of US$3 per day so that corporations will not pit countries against each other.

The WSF exhibited an electric energy, possibly from activists seeing they were not alone in their struggles and meeting people they have never met but only heard of before. From the Tibetan monks fighting for religious freedom, Bolivian revolutionaries who stopped the privatization of water, and the thousands of dalits from India marching for their rights, the sheer presence of the many different groups was very energizing and inspiring. Accompanying the awe was also an uncomfortable reminder of the overwhelming power and privilege we in the U.S. enjoy. It also came with a very humbling admiration for those who do not participate in the social justice field as professionals, but fight simply because they must. While we headed back to our comfortable hotels, many other participants slept on the WSF grounds because of limited affordable housing. It was moving to hear that landless farmers from throughout India saved for an entire year in order to attend. Regardless of our privileged positions, people met us with great interest to learn of the plight of immigrant workers in the U.S., and they were surprised to find that much of the same exploitation happens in the U.S. as in their own countries.

The World Social Forum was itself an overwhelming event. By hearing first-hand about labor challenges and sweatshop conditions in different countries, meeting amazing leaders, navigating immense crowds, dealing with guilt and power, yet being strengthened by the drumming and chants, WSF laid a fundamental piece of the groundwork for Sweatshop Watch’s global solidarity work.

Building Global Solidarity

Staff News

- Sweatshop Watch is pleased to welcome Alejandra Domenzain as the new Associate Director. Alejandra was formerly the Case Manager and Health Educator of the Garment Worker Center. She also worked with UCLA’s Labor Occupational Safety and Health Program and National Council of La Raza. She brings to Sweatshop Watch over ten years of experience working with immigrants and workers in the U.S. and other countries, including recent advocacy and popular education experience with garment workers.
- Sweatshop Watch wishes all the best to Blinker Punsalan Wood, who led our campaign and public education work with a unique blend of energy, dynamism and humor. We are now seeking a new Campaign Coordinator. See www.sweatshopwatch.org for a job announcement.
- The Garment Worker Center (GWC) welcomes the recent additions to its staff: Lupe Larios, the new Case Manager, previously worked with the United Farm Workers; Cheryl Yip, the new Organizer, who last worked with Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE); Guadalupe Hernandez, the Worker Organizer, and former garment worker and GWC board member; and Helen Chien, the Worker Organizer and former garment worker and GWC board member. We also wish Lin-Shao Chin all the best and thank her for her work as an Organizer, building GWC’s programs and membership with Chinese garment workers.
New Feature: Country Profile
Women Garment Workers in Bangladesh

The spread of garment production to nearly 200 countries has changed realities for women in many developing countries. As we celebrate International Women’s Day on March 8, we look at globalization’s impact on the women in Bangladesh.

Globalization has led to the development of the garment industry in Bangladesh through the Multi-Fiber Arrangement (MFA), an international agreement that allows consumer countries like the U.S. to set quotas on garment imports from producing countries. In the late seventies, garment importers found that many countries reached their quotas before the end of the year, and they sought new garment manufacturing in countries such as Bangladesh. Today, the industry has grown to take in 76% of Bangladesh’s total export earnings. Since 90% of its 1.8 million workers are women, the advent of the garment industry in the Eighties signified new possibilities and challenges for women.

Garment production is the entry-way for many women in Bangladesh looking for work. It provides job opportunities that lead to greater independence and more choices. At the same time, women workers face extremely harsh working conditions. They come mostly from rural villages looking for additional ways to support their families. Long hours in the factories, caring for the family, and safety are key concerns for many garment workers. In interviews with garment workers living in a women’s hostel run by Nari Uddug Kendra (Center for Women’s Initiatives), several say the “night duty” when they must work until 3:00 am trying to complete orders is the greatest challenge. Hours can be as long as working from 8:00 am to 3:00 am without breaks for two to three days straight. The walk home at night is often unsafe, as they may face harassment from men or police.

Despite the harsh working conditions, women’s voices are strong and are rising. Many take pride in earning their own money that gives them more decision-making power. Money is contributed to their families in the villages or goes towards providing for their own marriage dowry. Some women workers are organizing for reproductive rights. In a campaign led by the National Garment Worker’s Federation and the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity, women workers are demanding that garment factories provide the legally mandated 3-month paid maternity leave. Unions are also campaigning for the legal recognition of unions in the Export Processing Zones.

Bangladesh depends solely on the work of women who produce garment exports for big-name companies like Disney, J.C. Penney, Sears and Wal-Mart. Yet few protections exist for women workers. Bangladesh’s women workers will face an even more complicated situation when the Multi-Fiber Arrangement expires in 2005. Its phase-out is expected to lead to massive job loss in Bangladesh, with companies moving production to China, which has a steady supply of cheap labor and a greater infrastructure for garment manufacturing. The impending struggles for Bangladeshi women workers are compounded by this uncertain future. The anticipated loss of up to 1 million jobs will lead to greater poverty, exploitation, migration, and vulnerability for women workers of Bangladesh. Already, many displaced garment workers are turning to prostitution, as few job opportunities exist. Building on the alliances formed during the World Social Forum, we must act together to seek a better future for all the world’s women garment workers.

Facts at a Glance:

- Number of garment factories: 3,000
  mainly Dhaka, Bangladesh’s capital
- Average wages earned: US$40 per month
- Proposed living wage for region: US$60-70 per month (based on US$3 per day)
- Work week: 48 hours

The following is a verse from “Great Robbery ‘Pout Gaan,’” on the impact of globalization on Bangladesh. This was performed at the World Social Forum seminar entitled, “Female Garment Workers of Bangladesh: Awaiting a New Global Movement.” Script writer: Poet MD. Ilias Khokon, Concept Designer: Rafiqul Islam Khokon, “Pout” Artists: Sribas Mondol and Alok Mondol, Director: Swapon Guha. A “Pout Baan” is a performance that incorporates music and pictures as tools to communicate major themes.

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The Rising Tide Against Free Trade

In November 2003, Sweatshop Watch and the Garment Worker Center participated with thousands of demonstrators to protest the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) in Miami, Florida, where the most far reaching trade agreement ever proposed was being negotiated. Demonstrations in Miami added to the growing tide against corporate globalization that began at the derailed WTO talks in September 2003 in Cancún, Mexico and continued to the recently failed FTAA talks in Puebla, Mexico.

The intent of the FTAA is to lift trade barriers between the 34 nations covering North America, South America, Central America, and the Caribbean, except Cuba. It would essentially be an extension of the highly criticized North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), but with even stronger provisions that would give corporations more power and further jeopardize labor rights, human rights, and the environment. NAFTA’s record shows that sweatshop exploitation would become even more widespread with the FTAA, due to increased corporate power and ability to access cheap labor in countries with weak labor law enforcement.

Estimates say the FTAA will affect a population of 800 million people and a combined annual gross product of US$11 trillion. Despite the huge numbers of people and currency potentially affected by the FTAA ministerial decisions, these talks were held in secret. Protestors in Miami who wanted to highlight the importance of the trade talks on their communities struggled to deal with the immense police presence and brutality as many peaceful protestors suffered from rubber bullet shots, tear gas, intimidation, and harassment.

Despite the difficulties in the streets, the resistance did have an impact, as trade negotiators were only able to agree on an “FTAA-lite,” which outlined the continuation of the FTAA but with drastically reduced measures. Talks recently concluded at an impasse in Puebla, Mexico in February 2004, yet trade representatives stubbornly agreed to maintain a skeleton of the FTAA.

Even with such setbacks, the Bush Administration continues to push its free trade agenda. When the FTAA talks first began showing signs of breakdown, the U.S. initiated plans for the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) in January 2003. These negotiations would give the U.S. more opportunities to pressure the smaller nations in Central America to agree to a mini-FTAA.

In February 2004, President Bush notified Con-
Play Fair at the Olympics!

Global Trade Watch: www.citizen.org/trade

In the lead-up to the Athens Olympic Games in August, Global Unions, the Clean Clothes Campaign, Oxfams and their allies around the world will be campaigning with sportswear workers to persuade sports brands and the International Olympics Committee (IOC) to Play Fair At The Olympics and ensure respect for sportswear workers’ rights.

As momentum builds toward the Athens Olympic Games, it is not just athletes who are feeling the pressure. The global sportswear industry is using ruthless tactics to produce the latest fashions, made cheaper and faster and to ever more punishing deadlines. In order to deliver, suppliers are forcing their employees to work longer and harder, denying them their fundamental workers’ rights. These women and men endure long hours; low wages, harsh working conditions, face extreme job insecurity and are typically prevented from exercising their right to join and form trade unions.

“Every day we work from 8 am until noon, then break for lunch. After lunch we work again from 1 pm until 5 pm. We have to do overtime every day, starting from 5:30 pm. We work until 2 am or 3 am during the peak season... Sometimes we want to rest, but our employer forces us to work.” —Thai sportswear worker

“There is a lot of verbal abuse. The management calls us names throughout the time when we work. They call us “stupid”, “lazy”, “useless”, “bastard’s child”, and other crass words. They say “You don’t deserve any more than this”. Some girls start crying. Physical abuse happens too. Our ears are often pulled, and managers yell directly into our ears.” —Indonesian sportswear worker

For the launch of the campaign, various activities will take place globally - from offering the report that accompanies this campaign to the national IOCs and demonstrations in front of sportswear stores, to press conferences and public Greek parades.

Subsequently the campaign opens with a two-month Global Season of Action. Around the world people will take part by signing action cards or petitions, leafleting their workplaces or communities and organizing creative protests. The range of actions vary from torch relays to bike rides, Greek gods in a national Olympic Stadium and giant washing lines.

The more of us who take part, the harder it will be to ignore us - so we need you to get involved! Check out the campaign website - www.fairolympics.org - for pictures and news of launch events, a copy of the Play Fair at the Olympics report and for actions you can take.

Campaign News

• Tarrant Factory Closes, NAO Takes Up Complaint—On February 3, 2004, the Tarrant México – Ajalpan plant closed its doors and laid off the remaining 600 workers. According to workers’ reports, management says the factory will likely reopen in five or six months under the name of AZT International, a wholly owned and operated subsidiary of Azteca Production International located in Los Angeles, California. The Pantzingo-Ajalpan plant was the last of the six Tarrant México factories to close in the Tehuacán area in the past five months, leaving a total of 5,000 workers unemployed. The three remaining leaders of the Independent Union of Tarrant México Company Workers (SUITTAR) have refused to settle for less than 100% of their legally entitled severance pay. The three leaders – Salvador García Sánchez, Celso Morales Canseco and Maribel Ramirez Torres – instead insisted on their reinstallation, and hearing dates are scheduled for March 2 and 22 before the Local Conciliation and Arbitration Board of Puebla #2.

In February 2004, under the auspices of the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (NAALC – NAFTA’s labor side agreement), the U.S. National Administrative Office (NAO) accepted a complaint filed by the United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) and Centro de Apoyo al Trabajador (CAT) arguing a pattern of denial of independent unions’ legal registrations by Mexican Conciliation and Arbitration Boards. USAS and CAT initially filed the submission after the Matamoros Garment factory closed down and illegally denied workers their independent union registration; however, the submission was amended to include the Tarrant México – Ajalpan case, which also illustrates this pattern. Though the NAALC process has historically been weak and lost credibility over the years, the workers view this as an additional tool to pressure the Mexican government, the factories and their international denim clients to obey Mexican law and recognize the workers’ independent unions. The U.S. NAO has 120 days to review the submission and issue a public report. A hearing is scheduled for April 1 in Washington DC. The hearing will be preceded by a speaking tour of the workers through California and Ohio, where Tarrant and its major clients are based. For more information, visit www.sweatshopwatch.org.

• Garment Workers Win Legal Victory over Forever 21—In March 2004, in a much-anticipated decision in the legal battle between Los Angeles garment workers and trendy retailer Forever 21, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals refused to affirm a lower court’s ruling that garment workers could state no valid legal claims.
against a clothing retailer for sweatshop abuses. The Ninth Circuit also reversed District Judge Manuel Real’s dismissal in March 2002 of the workers’ lawsuit and ordered the federal court to dismiss the workers’ state law claims against Forever 21 without prejudice, thus allowing the workers to proceed with their lawsuit against Forever 21 in state court.

On September 6, 2001, nineteen garment workers who labored in six different Los Angeles sweatshops filed a lawsuit against Forever 21 alleging that the company violated state wage and hour laws, engaged in unfair and unlawful business practices under state law, and was negligent in its use of sweatshops. The workers alleged that for varying periods of time between February of 1998 through June of 2001, they typically labored six days a week, nine to twelve hours a day, were routinely denied their legal wages while making clothes for Forever 21, and were not provided with meal breaks or rest breaks. In addition to long hours and substandard wages, the workers alleged that they were subjected to other deplorable and illegal working conditions, such as unsafe and filthy factories that were poorly lit, poorly ventilated, filled with fabric dust, and infested with vermin. The nineteen workers who filed the original lawsuit, together with additional workers who have since stepped forward, intend to proceed with their claims against Forever 21 by filing a lawsuit in state superior court. Learn more about the workers’ boycott against Forever 21 and how you can get involved at www.garmentworkercenter.org.

- ‘Wins’ Garment Workers’ Trial Ends—In November 2003, a San Francisco Superior Court trial began on a $3 million lawsuit filed against two San Francisco garment sweatshop owners who have refused to pay almost 300 workers wages owed for over 2 years. The lawsuit against former ‘Wins’ garment factory owners Anna Wong and Jimmy Quan was filed by the California Labor Commissioner, and joined by two former workers, Mui Yan Fang and Li Qin Yang Zhou, and the Chinese Progressive Association. The Women’s Employment Rights Clinic of Golden Gate University School of Law and the Asian Law Caucus are representing the former workers and the Association. According to former seamstress Mui Yan Fang, “Through this lawsuit, we are not only demanding what’s rightfully owed to us, but we also want to send a message to all employers that illegal labor abuses will not be tolerated.” The trial ended in February 2004, and a ruling is expected by the Summer.

- Saipan Lawsuits End—In January 2004, the last of three lawsuits over sweatshop conditions on the U.S. island of Saipan came to a close. Saipan garment workers voluntarily dismissed their class action lawsuit against Levi-Strauss and Company, the only retailer to refuse to contribute to a settlement fund for the workers. Recognizing that they had already won a landmark $20 million settlement with 26 other U.S. retailers and 23 Saipan garment factories, the workers and labor advocates involved in the lawsuit declared victory. Back payments for up to 30,000 Saipan workers, including those who sewed Levi’s, are being distributed and an independent monitoring program of Saipan garment factories has begun. Over the past four years, consumers and activists across the U.S. and abroad supported the Saipan workers’ struggle by making your concerns known to the retailers producing on Saipan. We thank you for your support!

- Bebe Settles Lawsuits with Los Angeles Garment Workers—In February 2004, the Asian Pacific American Legal Center announced that the 13 workers who had filed 2 separate lawsuits against Bebe, a women’s clothing retailer, in December 2001 and May 2002, respectively, had reached a satisfactory settlement with the retailer. In the past two years, many of you had participated in protests against Bebe, who had contracted directly with these workers employers. We thank you for your support!

- Wet Seal Settles Lawsuit with Los Angeles Garment Workers—In January 2004, women’s clothing retailer The Wet Seal, Inc. settled a lawsuit with four Los Angeles garment workers who claimed they worked 68 hours a week for several years without receiving more than $4 per hour. Wet Seal agreed to pay the workers $90,000, an amount equal to their claim for unpaid wages. The company will also contribute $40,000 to Bet Tzedek Legal Services, who represented the workers, to support their ongoing efforts on behalf of Southern California garment workers. In December 2002, under California’s garment statute Assembly Bill 633, the Labor Commissioner awarded the four workers $240,000 in back pay, damages and manufacturer were deemed liable for the remaining $150,000. Wet Seal appealed its portion of the decision, but settled before the case went to trial. Workers and advocates hope the settlement will send a message to other private-label retailers that they are liable for wage violations under California law and should work proactively to prevent labor abuse.
**Robbery in Trade**

The robbers are not robbing Bangladesh alone
The Great Trade Robber spares no one.
In the name of the trade they make such laws
That rip the poor apart by their evil claws.
In the last two decades Bangladesh did earn
Much from readymade garments in turn.
Two million workers earned two million jobs,
And a living that the new trade regime robs.
Four thousand factories closed down already.
One and a half million lost jobs that were steady.
The fangs and claws of the rules of trade
Put the workers without food, health or a shed.
This a battle we all have to fight
Without a gun, and with our plight.

Trade robbers are impending
In the guise of global trading.
Be aware, stand together,
And rise o sister, o brother.

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**Resources**

- **Trading Away our Rights: Women Working in Global Supply Chains** is a new report by Oxfam International, as part of its Made Trade Fair Campaign. It is based on research and interviews in 12 countries and documents how current business practices favor production where it is cheapest, fastest and most flexible, highlighting the garment and food industries. Visit [www.oxfam.org/eng/pdfs/report_042008_labor.pdf](http://www.oxfam.org/eng/pdfs/report_042008_labor.pdf).

- **Children of NAFTA** is a new book by David Bacon, which provides a close look at the impact of NAFTA on people working along the U.S.-Mexico border and details the emergence of cross-border organizing. Call 800-777-4726 or visit [www.ucpress.edu](http://www.ucpress.edu).

- The **Coalition of Immokalee Workers** has a new, free DVD about the Taco Bell boycott, conditions in the fields, and the organization’s history. For a copy, email your mailing address to workers@ciw-online.org, or visit [www.ciw-online.org](http://www.ciw-online.org) for a preview.

- **No Sweatshops: Information and Action Kit** is a new resource from Sweatshop Watch. The kit which is geared towards students, teachers, consumers and activists, includes over a dozen factsheets on sweatshops, campaign materials and a DVD with a preview of the *Made in LA* documentary film. $10 each plus shipping. Order at [www.sweatshopwatch.org](http://www.sweatshopwatch.org) or 510.834.8990.

  The kit features informative factsheets on:
  - What is a sweatshop?
  - Sweatshops in our backyard?
  - Global Sweatshops
  - Sweatshops & Globalization’s "Race to the Bottom"
  - Fighting for Global Justice
  - Human Need Over Corporate Greed
  - Immigrant Rights Are Human Rights
  - Environmental Impacts of Sweatshops
  - Sweatshop Labor and Women
  - Successes in the Struggle to End Sweatshops
  - Frequently Asked Questions
  - Current Campaigns/Alternatives
  - What you can do!
  - And more...
How To Give To Sweatshop Watch

Every gift to Sweatshop Watch goes a long way in protecting the rights of garment workers.

- Write a check and send it to our Oakland office.
- Make a donation with your credit card by visiting our web site www.sweatshopwatch.org.
- Ask your employer to match your gift.
- Give your time as a volunteer.
- Make a gift of goods or services.
- Designate Sweatshop Watch in a planned gift (will or trust).
- If you are a Working Assets customer, vote for Sweatshop Watch on your donation ballot at the end of the year.

Sweatshop Watch is a nonprofit public charity, registered under IRS Code 501(c)3. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

www.sweatshopwatch.org

SWEATSHOP WATCH™
310 Eighth Street, Suite 303
Oakland, CA 94607

Address Service Requested

Join Sweatshop Watch!

Founded in 1995, Sweatshop Watch is a coalition of over 30 organizations, and many individuals, committed to eliminating the exploitation that occurs in sweatshops. Sweatshop Watch serves low-wage workers nationally and globally, with a focus on garment workers in California. We believe that workers should earn a living wage in a safe, decent work environment, and that those responsible for the exploitation of sweatshop workers must be held accountable. Please join us by becoming a member. Either send in this form with a check or make a contribution from our website www.sweatshopwatch.org with your credit card.

Total Enclosed:  $20   $50   $100   $250   $500   Other  $________

Name:
Address:
Phone: ___________________________ Email: ___________________________

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