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New report! Toxic Uniforms: Behind the 'Made in USA' Label

Today, International Human Rights Day, the 61st anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, let’s remember that labor rights are human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests” (Article 23, Section 4). That is why we are releasing a new report today exposing extensive human rights violations at government supplier factories in Massachusetts and Puerto Rico. Toxic Uniforms: Behind the 'Made in USA' Label argues that "Made in USA" requirement for Department of Defense, Homeland Security and Coast Guard apparel and textile procurement provides little insurance against poor working conditions and low wages. To safeguard workers’ human rights a new federal sweatfree procurement policy is needed.

Click here for a free online copy of the report and today's press release. Printed copies also available.

Weigh in: What should be in a Fair Trade garment label?

TransFair USA, the U.S. fair trade certifying organization, has released a fair trade draft standard for apparel to apply to both factories with hired labor as well as cooperative producer organizations. TransFair is seeking public comment until December 31st and hopes to have the label hit retail shelves in 2010 as part of a pilot program. Read the details of the standard and please send your comments to garments@transfairusa.org. SweatFree Communities will be advocating for:

- Living wage as a binding requirement on participating companies, which may be met progressively if there are clear benchmarks.
- An active role for TransFair in facilitating price and volume negotiations between buyers and factories to ensure factories receive the volume and prices they need to ensure compliance with labor standards and living wages.
• Strict enforcement of freedom of association and collective bargaining rights, including insurance that the management of a fair trade fund does not supplant or undermine the role of a legitimate labor union.
• Transparent and independent monitoring of fair trade standards.

**Sweatfree Purchasing Consortium welcomes New York as newest member**

As a result of successful organizing by the New York Labor-Religion Coalition and other supporters, Governor David Paterson has just announced that New York is joining the Consortium. Governor Paterson said: "I believe that the Sweatfree Purchasing Consortium will serve as a crucial tool in creating and maintaining standards of workplace fairness and safety in our global economy."

Now the Consortium has eight initial members -- Ashland, Ore., Austin, Tex., Maine, Milwaukee, Wisc., New York, Pennsylvania, Portland, Ore., and San Francisco -- which together procure over $50 million in apparel and textiles annually.

**Report-back from the National SweatFree Summit**

Last month we held our sixth annual gathering in Washington DC. We kicked off the National SweatFree Summit on Friday with a policy forum on Capitol Hill to start up a conversation on a federal sweatfree procurement policy. The forum featured Albert Torres, a sewing machine operator who makes soldiers' uniforms for Propper International in Puerto Rico, Miguel Ruiz, a union leader from Nicaragua, along with many other captivating speakers.

Many thanks to our co-sponsors who helped provide travel scholarships to low-income organizers from around the country or donated in-kind support -- we couldn't have pulled off the event without you! Check out the work of our sponsors by clicking the links below:

Catholic Relief Services, Change to Win, Ethix Merch, Equal Exchange, Global Exchange, Harrison Institute for Public Law at Georgetown University, Handcrafting Justice, International Labor Rights Forum, Justice Clothing, Maggie's Organics, Mid-Atlantic Regional Joint Board of Workers United, Milwaukee Clean Clothes Campaign, New York State United Teachers, Ohio Conference on Fair Trade (and Jobs with Justice in Cleveland, Columbus, and Toledo), Presbyterian Hunger Program, Protexall, Unionwear, United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries, United Methodist Church Global Ministries, and The Working World.

Read more here.

**New policy paper on federal procurement**

At a forum on Capitol Hill on November 6, sponsored by Rep. Mike Michaud (Maine) and Rep. Phil Hare (Illinois), SweatFree Communities, the AFL-CIO, the American Federation of Government Employees, Change to Win, International Labor Rights Forum, the Worker
Rights Consortium, and Workers United jointly released a policy paper outlining principles of government procurement reform to ensure decent working conditions for overseas workers who make products or provide services for federal government agencies. The paper proposes a three-pronged strategy: core labor standards and a living wage requirement for overseas facilities; vendor prequalification requiring contractors to ensure that their own business practices do not contribute to the problem of sweatshops; and a follow-up enforcement program based on transparency, worker education, and independent investigations. Millions of workers can be positively impacted when the federal government harnesses its purchasing power to support global worker rights.

Read more here.

Sweatfree Art Show planned at Portland City Hall. Bring the art to your city next!

On December 18th, paintings of garment workers will adorn Portland (Oregon) City Hall when labor rights activists will celebrate a year's work since the passage of the city's sweatfree purchasing policy. This educational art exhibit aims to give a human face to the workers behind the uniforms of our police, firefighters and other public employees, and provide resources of local sweatshop-free/fair trade purchasing. The "Sweatfree Art Show," 5:00-7:00pm on 12/18 at City Hall, will feature the Portland Bureau of Purchases, artist Janet Essley, and a former garment worker and union organizer. The event will also include free food, beverages, music by Bajo Salario, and ethically produced products from local fair trade/sweatshop-free businesses. Special thanks go to Mayor Sam Adams' Office for working with Sweatfree Northwest to make this event possible.

To bring the exhibit "Presente: She is here with us" of garment worker paintings by Janet Essley to your city, email us.

Shop with a Conscience this holiday season

Looking for a gift for a loved-one? In need of some nice toasty gear to keep you warm this winter? Check out our Shop with a Conscience Consumer Guide, updated for this holiday season. All products are made by workers who are organized in cooperatives or independent trade unions. All retailers must meet these standards. For bulk orders, see our Wholesale Guide.