

FOR WORKERS → CCC SOLIDARITY ACTION → MAKING A DIFFERENCE



GARMENT WORKERS' DEMONSTRATION, THAILAND, 2006



Since the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) was launched nearly two decades ago, CCC activists have supported garment and sport shoe workers in 30 countries seeking justice in some 300 cases in which their rights were violated.

Speaking out in solidarity with the women and men who produce the world's clothes has had a **positive impact**: in some cases workers demands were met – we can consider these outright victories – while in others, even where workers requests were not met, some success was booked in terms of creating a space for them to voice their concerns. We might still have a long way to go toward cleaning up the global garment industry, but the bad working conditions and thousands of workers pushing for change are no longer a secret.

**Direct solidarity action** is one of the main tools used by the Clean Clothes Campaign to reach its goals of improved working conditions in the global garment and sports shoe sectors and the empowerment of workers. The NGOs and trade unions that are part of the CCC coalitions throughout Europe work with allies around the world to respond to the urgent requests for action ("**urgent appeals**") that the CCC receives each week.

## SUPPORTING GARMENT WORKERS GLOBALLY

Our clothes are made in factories, small workshops, and even in homes located all around the world. In the course of its work, the CCC has been in contact with garment workers (they are mainly women) and the organizations that support them (such as trade unions, labor rights organizations, womens rights organizations, legal aid organizations, religious organizations) from some 30 countries. The majority of the cases taken up by the CCC originate in Asia (nearly 75%). The largest share of garment production for Europe is currently carried out in Asia and therefore this is where our partner network is the most extensive.

## PUSHING COMPANIES FOR SUPPLY CHAIN RESPONSIBILITY

Workers seek to defend their rights **locally**, through negotiation with their employers or through other mechanisms available to them (for example, via the legal system). But sometimes they request support at the **international level**, to help press the brand name companies and retailers that source internationally to take responsibility for their role in determining working conditions. The CCC has succeeded in putting these issues on the corporate agenda; while years ago companies would quickly deny any responsibility for working conditions where their products are made, now this is largely recognized as something they have to address.

Since the CCC began its work many companies have developed codes of conduct; hired staff to follow up on compliance with labor standards; have joined initiatives to work together with other companies in the sector, unions

and other labor rights organizations, to develop solutions to the major problems in the sector (multi-stakeholder initiatives); and have published social reports on the work they are doing to address the problems in their supply chains. These efforts might be incomplete, for example codes are often not implemented – though even these “promises on paper” have been useful tools to pressure companies for positive changes. There is clearly more acknowledgement of the problems facing garment workers.



CCC ACTION AT  
RETAILER,  
UK, 2005

## TOP CONCERN: FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

Rights violations are rampant throughout the garment industry and the variety of forms this takes is reflected in the requests for action that the CCC receives. Low or unpaid wages, long hours, unsafe conditions, sexual harassment – these are all examples of violations that workers have experienced and that the CCC has raised in the course of urgent action case work (on average 30 cases per year in recent years).

However, the most common right that is violated is freedom of association: workers who try to organize themselves to defend their rights routinely experience **discrimination, harassment, are unjustly dismissed, verbally** and sometimes **physically abused** and are put on **blacklists** to prevent them from getting jobs elsewhere. Many of the cases that the CCC works on are related to violations of workers’ rights to organize and bargain collectively (approximately 67% in 2004, 45% in 2005). Ensuring respect for these rights is crucial in

the CCC’s view, because workers who are able to form their own organizations and negotiate with their employers are better able to defend their other rights in the workplace. Through their ongoing work on urgent appeals cases, CCC staff in ten European countries regularly support the efforts of workers to organize in countries where garments are produced. **National-level CCC’s** throughout Europe use their networks to **mobilize the public** into action in the context of these cases, giving consumers a clear way to help improve the generally bad conditions where their clothes are made. Examples of these activities include e-mail and fax campaigns and awareness-raising events.

## COOPERATION AND STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

The CCC works with other organizations to simultaneously push all those responsible for improving workplace conditions (for example factory owners, buying agents, brand name companies and retailers) to actively work to solve problems. Using this “multiple pressure point” approach has often meant putting a “triangle solidarity” strategy into action: campaigning in the country where violations occur, in as many countries where the goods are sold/buyers are based, and also in the home country of the factory owner. Supporting this model results in more sharing of skills and experience between labor rights activists globally, as well as the development of joint strategies that make our work more complementary. Ultimately this is more effective. For example in Thailand when a garment factory was shut down at short notice the prolonged campaigning by workers and their organizations to push for fair compensation was supported by activists where the company’s clients were based (Europe and North America), while activists in Hong Kong where the factory’s owners were headquartered also took up the case. As a result, the workers succeeded in getting a better settlement.

### WOMEN ARE NOT INVISIBLE

**Most workers in the global garment and sportswear industries are women: The CCC always tries to raise awareness of this fact. The campaign supports solutions for garment industry problems that take on the gendered issues underpinning the violation of womens’ rights in the workplace. Wages for women garment workers are generally so low that they and their families live in extreme poverty. Support for freedom of association means supporting an important enabling tool for women to negotiate better wages and working conditions, the economic justice they are entitled to.**

**For more on gender, the global garment industry, and the movement for women workers’ rights, see “Made by Women”, [www.cleanclothes.org/ftp/made\\_by\\_women.pdf](http://www.cleanclothes.org/ftp/made_by_women.pdf)**



CCC ACTION  
AT RETAILER,  
NETHERLANDS, 2002

## CASEWORK TO SUPPORT SECTOR-WIDE SOLUTIONS

The CCC knows that the global garment industry cannot be cleaned up one workplace at a time, however these individual cases do play an important role in moving us closer to the goal of an industry that provides a better workplace for its workers.

Many of the urgent appeals cases that have been successes for workers have also set precedents that have an important potential spill-over effect; the impact can reach beyond the workers in one workplace and be used to push for **improvements on a larger scale**. For example, in cases that the CCC has taken up where workers were pushing for recognition of their own organizations in factories in Sri Lanka, Haiti, and Bangladesh, victories gave inspiration to workers in nearby workplaces or in the same free trade zones.

With experience of dozens of concrete cases of rights violations in the garment and sports shoe industries each year, as well as attempts to resolve those problems, the CCC is able to provide an important contribution to discussions about the ways in which the entire sector could be cleaned up. The CCC regularly publishes **discussion papers** on key issues that need to be addressed in the garment industry, drawing upon examples from recent urgent appeals cases. The CCC also engages in a **dialogue** with those seriously working on a sector-wide approach for improvements in the sector. For example, the CCC regularly gives input to the main multi-stakeholder initiatives (for example the Fair Labor Association and the Worker Rights Consortium in the United States and the Fair Wear Foundation and Ethical Trading Initiative in Europe) that work with companies on the implementation of good labor standards at their supply factories.

## SUPPORTING WORKERS ADVOCATES AROUND THE WORLD

The Clean Clothes Campaigns in Europe are backed up by a **diverse partner network** made up of organizations around the world. We work with partner organizations to support workers in cases where their rights are violated, but also provide the same kind of support to partner organizations when their work is threatened.

Pushing for human rights in the workplace in most countries challenges the status quo, therefore those who get involved in these issues in garment-producing countries put themselves at risk of harassment or arrest. Examples of successes include participation in a successful campaign for the release of an imprisoned Malaysian labor rights activist and a campaign which resulted in a libel case against a Thai labor rights organization being dropped.

### CONCRETE WAYS CCC HELPS WORKERS' STRUGGLES

Successful cases that the Clean Clothes Campaign has been involved in – for example, pushing for the reinstatement of unjustly dismissed union representatives in Cambodia, pushing for a higher minimum wage for garment workers in Bangladesh, and calling for the release of an imprisoned labor rights activist in Mexico – are the result of a lot of work carried out by many people and organizations, not just by CCC coalition organizations and partners but also by allies at campaigns in other parts of the world.

There are a number of ways that the CCC has worked together with others to support garment and sports shoe workers who are seeking justice in their workplaces.



These include:

- 1 **Providing information on brands** producing at factories where violations took place (including information on their codes of conduct);
- 2 **Providing information on multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs)** that have member companies producing at the workplace in question and what the possibilities are for the MSI to play a role in facilitating a resolution to the dispute;
- 3 **Making contact with workplace management/owners, brands/retailers, MSIs, auditors, public authorities, and industry associations** to communicate workers' demands;
- 4 **Helping to facilitate communications** between workers' organizations and companies/MSIs/auditors;
- 5 **Preparing and distributing public materials and public events** to raise awareness of workers' demands; and
- 6 **Coordinating communications among campaigning organizations** working on cases.

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM & ABOUT URGENT ACTION CAMPAIGNING

Understanding why cases in support of garment workers rights are successful (and why they are not) is important. CCC research into the **impact** of its urgent appeals work reveals that cases in which gains have been made for workers share some characteristics.

These include:

- 1 Workers are well organized**, usually into unions (either at the factory level or beyond), with the majority supporting the issue being campaigned on and strong enough to withstand the consequences of an international campaign (pressure from management, media attention, etc.);
- 2 A strong campaign** exists at the national level in the country **where the violation has occurred**;
- 3 Facilitation**: by a person, organization, or MSI on the ground in the country producing the garments. This role is often vital for information flow;
- 4 Multiple pressure points are targeted internationally** (for example: employer, agent, manufacturing company, brand name company, retailer, public authorities) to support workers demands;
- 5** The strategy of both the international solidarity campaign and the campaign at the local level in the producing country encompasses a **variety of (creative) tactics and tools** directed at multiple pressure points;



- 6 **Regular updates to supporters**, including positive movement towards a resolution, are an important motivator;
- 7 Where available **legal decisions** or recommendations by respected authorities that support workers demands are used **as leverage** to pressure companies to intervene to try to resolve the dispute; and
- 8 A **sustained campaign**, usually over a long period of time.

## READ MORE ABOUT URGENT APPEALS

To read more about the CCC Urgent Appeals system see [www.cleanclothes.org/ftp/UA\\_leaflet.pdf](http://www.cleanclothes.org/ftp/UA_leaflet.pdf). This publication explains more about what CCC urgent appeals are, the process for deciding to take urgent action, how the system works, the various activities involved, examples of cases, and how to inform the CCC about a potential urgent appeals case.



LEAFLETTING AT  
RETAILER,  
GERMANY, 2006

## EXAMPLES OF URGENT ACTION CAMPAIGNING

### Attention to unsafe conditions in Bangladesh factories

In 2005 when yet another garment factory in Bangladesh turned into the site of a terrible tragedy – this time the collapse of a building left 64 dead and 74 injured – the CCC stepped up its campaigning on health and safety problems in the sector in Bangladesh. Over the years numerous fires and accidents had left scores dead and injured, and despite some concerned noises from companies and public authorities sadly after each incident it seemed to be business as usual. Following the 2005 factory collapse the CCC targeted not only the many European brands and retailers producing their clothes at the factory, but also put pressure on all those sourcing in Bangladesh, as well as the government and industry associations, to let them know that they had a life-or-death responsibility to ensure a safe workplace for the women and men making garments. As a result health and safety standards have improved and efforts to monitor working conditions have been strengthened.

### Indonesian workers reinstated

Hundreds of workers were unjustly dismissed from their jobs at a factory in Indonesia producing for the brands Polo, Ralph Lauren and Jones New York and US retailer The Limited. This came about after management closed the factory in 2004 rather than negotiate an agreement on wages with the workers' union. The efforts of a multi-stakeholder organization (WRC) in the US, a public campaign in the US carried out by the Campaign for Labor Rights, and the support of the CCC network in Europe resulted in the reopening of the factory and the reinstatement of the workers who wanted to return to the factory.



CCC ACTION,  
UK, 2006

### Imprisoned Chinese garment workers set free

When workers at a shoe factory in China staged massive protests in 2004 to draw attention to the deplorable working conditions at their workplace several of the activists were put in prison. China Labour Bulletin took up the case, as did sportswear company Reebok (a Stella client). The CCC reached out to other companies producing at the factory: Nike, Timberland, Sears, Jones Apparel, Clark Shoes, New Balance, Kenneth Cole, and Marc Jacobs to encourage them to contact the Chinese authorities and factory management about this case. With a strong legal case presented by their lawyers in China, as well as major media coverage there, the positive intervention of some of the factory's clients, and the support of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the workers' sentences were reduced and eventually they were released for time served.



## JOIN THE CCC URGENT ACTION NETWORK!

Become a part of the Clean Clothes Campaign Urgent Action Network and receive CCC urgent appeals by e-mail. Appeals include background information on workers actively defending their rights and concrete ways that you can support them.

Sign up today at: [www.cleanclothes.org/action/index.htm](http://www.cleanclothes.org/action/index.htm)

**For more information on all the ways the CCC works to improve conditions in the garment industry:**

See [www.cleanclothes.org/publications/ccc\\_flyer.htm](http://www.cleanclothes.org/publications/ccc_flyer.htm)

**Questions about solidarity action in support of garment workers?**

Please get in touch with the CCC International Secretariat or the CCC nearest you. See the contact information on the following page.

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