

Amid Economic Crisis, Michigan Leaders Celebrate Human Rights Day, Call on Governor to End Tax Support for Sweatshops

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Interviews and Photographs available on request.

SweatFree Michigan supporters deliver postcards of support for a sweatshop-free policy

Lansing – Michigan religious leaders and labor unions joined State Representatives Fred Miller and Rebekah Warren today at the State Capitol to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to show support for the creation of a sweatshop-free policy for the State of Michigan as one way to address the current economic crisis.

"By adopting sweatfree purchasing policies, the state can ensure tax dollars are going to companies that provide good-paying jobs, as opposed to ones that employ unfair labor practices," said Rep. Miller, chair of the House Labor Committee.

Participants read from the Declaration and called on Governor Granholm to sign an executive order to establish a sweatshop-free procurement policy for Michigan and to join the Sweatfree Consortium. The Sweatfree Consortium is a collaborative effort of state and local governments committed to enforcing sweatfree purchasing policies that address human rights violations.

"It is important that our State is not part of the race to the bottom where goods are made in sweatshops for pennies at the high price of human misery," said Father Norm Thomas, pastor of Sacred Heart Church and member of the Detroit Interfaith Coalition. "We as a State have to take the high ground."

Supporters then delivered hundreds of postcards to Governor Granholm, urging her to join with other state and local governments in ending tax dollar support for sweatshops by joining the Sweatfree Consortium. They thanked her for standing up for workers rights in the past, citing her No Worker Left Behind program designed to retrain displaced workers. A sweatfree policy, SweatFree Michigan explained, would level the playing field for ethical businesses and support good jobs at home.

"During a time of great economic difficulty, we remind ourselves that responsible purchasing is both a human rights imperative and an important economic stimulus," said Rep. Warren. "A sweatfree policy will level the playing field for ethical businesses and support good jobs at home."

"The worse the economy gets the easier it is to get workers to work for next to nothing with no rights at all. This must end," said Dia Pearce, Political Director for UNITEHERE. "We look forward to continuing to work with the Governors office to end sweatshops in Michigan, the United States and throughout the world."

Participants also released the new 2009 Shop with a Conscience Guide for the holiday shopping season as an example of an easy way to support living wages and decent working conditions particularly during a time of economic difficulty for working families.

For more information, visit www.sweatfree.org/mi

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SweatFree Michigan is a dynamic coalition of more than 20 Michigan faith, labor, student, human rights, and community organizations advocating for responsible purchasing policies at the state and local level. Learn more at www.sweatfree.org/mi

SweatFree Communities coordinates a national network of grassroots campaigns that promote humane working conditions in apparel and other labor-intensive global industries by working with both public and religious institutions to adopt sweatshop-free purchasing policies. Using institutional purchasing as a lever for worker justice, the sweatfree movement empowers ordinary people to create a just global economy through local action. Learn more at www.sweatfree.org