

Activists to Wear Clean Clothes or Nothing in First-Ever National Sweatfree Conference in Albany, NY Friday - Sunday

News Release

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May 12, 2004

Unite to Fight for Historic Sweatshop Reforms

With the loss of US manufacturing jobs and trade issues taking center stage in the presidential candidate debate, anti-sweatshop activists across the country are pushing through a wave of historic reforms aimed at using tax dollars to promote fair trade and anti-sweatshop alternatives. Albany, NY will host many of the sweatfree movement's leaders when an array of anti-sweatshop activists arrive here this Friday for the first national "SweatFree Communities Conference," May 14-16. **Former California State Senator Tom Hayden, co-director of the "No More Sweatshops" movement, is featured speaker on at 2:20pm on Saturday. A press conference is scheduled for 1:50pm on Saturday.**

Conference organizers point out that US tax dollars often subsidize abusive child and exploitative labor domestically and overseas and undermine the job security of U.S. workers who have fair pay and good working conditions when public agencies purchase uniforms and other apparel. "We are paying to lose our jobs and this has to stop now by reforming public policy from coast to coast," says Dan Hennefeld, Director for the UNITE union's Uniform Project. "This conference will lead the way."

Participants are also spreading their message by committing to "wearing clean clothes or nothing at all at the conference," says conference organizer Bjorn Claeson. "They will be fair-trade models for their schools, cities and states." **The conference takes place at the New York State United Teachers headquarters, 800 Troy-Schenectady Road in Latham.**

"We're moving millions of purchasing dollars to the workers' cause," says SweatFree Communities Board President Brian O'Shaughnessy, also Executive Director of the New York State Labor-Religion Coalition, host of the conference. Among other conference participants are a group of Maryland high-school students originally from Central America, who want their school district to go sweatfree and help workers back in their home countries; a distributor for two worker-owned fair trade apparel production facilities in Mexico and Nicaragua; clergy such as World Mission Ministries of the Milwaukee Archdiocese; and a sweatfree baseball campaign from Pittsburgh.

Sweatfree purchasing policies, including a milestone California state law that just went into effect, require government vendors and their subcontractors to abide by fair labor standards when doing business with the taxpayers' money and supplying goods such as law enforcement uniforms, college sportswear and footwear. The states of Maine, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania have also passed anti-sweatshop legislation, as well as dozens of cities and schools of all sizes, from Boston to Milwaukee to Los Angeles to Toledo to Olympia, Washington.

SweatFree Communities is a network of anti-sweatshop organizations supporting and promoting sweatfree institutional purchasing campaigns and linking efforts against local and global sweatshops.