Sweatfree DC Campaign Launch Press Release

Date of publication: April 15, 2009

Source: International Labor Rights Forum

U.S. tax dollars spent in sweatshops

Child labor, forced and unpaid overtime, toxic conditions found in government contractors’ facilities as human rights groups rally at Post Offices across the country amid ailing global economy

Elected officials, clergy, business owners and labor leaders will gather at U.S. Post Offices in at least 17 U.S. cities on Tax Day to release a new report revealing that U.S. states and cities, and the federal government, continue to use taxpayer money to purchase goods from companies engaged in serious human rights and labor rights violations. The International Labor Rights Forum will gather with concerned DC residents at 12:00pm on Wednesday in front of the IRS, located at 1500 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Subsidizing Sweatshops II [1], released by SweatFree Communities, a national organization dedicated to promoting humane working conditions in the apparel industry, is a follow-up to the groundbreaking 2008 first edition. The report includes in-depth interviews with workers in eight factories spanning five countries who produce uniforms for public employees such as police officers and parks service employees for nine major uniform brands.

The report specifically documents that:

• In a Mexican factory producing body armor for the U.S., some workers have been forced to work as much as an additional 4.5 hours each night WITHOUT pay.

• At the same factory in Mexico, women are forced to take a pregnancy test and those found pregnant are not hired.

• At a Dickies factory in Honduras, 58 workers have been fired and it appears it was because they supported the formation of a union at their factory.

This day marks the launch of the DC Sweatfree Campaign. The goal of the campaign is to encourage the city of DC to adopt an ethical purchasing policy for all apparel and join the Sweatfree Purchasing Consortium. The DC government spent over 6 million dollars on apparel in 2008. An examination of DC purchasing contracts shows that American Supply Company and JH Linen, two of the top five companies with apparel suppliers to DC in 2008, both supply Dickies brand clothing. Dickies factories in Mexico and Honduras have been caught numerous times paying workers poverty wages, forcing them to work overtime with no sick leave or days off, and intimidating and firing workers believed to be involved in union activities. These same suppliers, as well as other suppliers of DC apparel, are also sourcing from brands such as Blauer and Red Kap, whose factories also have histories of documented labor and human rights abuses.

ILRF is calling on Mayor Fenty to join the Sweatfree Purchasing Consortium, which would stop tax dollar
support for sweatshop abuses and level the playing field for ethical U.S. businesses. Many states and cities have already committed to joining the Consortium including the State of Pennsylvania, the City of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the City of Portland, Oregon, and the City of Olympia, Washington.

The report will be available on April 15 at www.sweatfree.org/subsidizing [1]

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International Labor Rights Forum is an advocacy organization dedicated to achieving just and humane treatment for workers worldwide. ILRF works to stop child labor, promote and protect the rights of working women, end sweatshop labor, and to end violence against trade unions. Learn more at www.laborrights.org [2].

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 [3].

The Sweatfree Purchasing Consortium, comprised of states, cities, counties, local government agencies, and school districts, as well as human rights advocates and labor rights experts, will pool resources of public entities to investigate working conditions in factories that make uniforms and other products for public employees. Cities and states will hold vendors to ethical standards, and create a market large enough to persuade companies to deal responsibly and ethically with their suppliers and workers. Learn more at www.buysweatfree.org [4].

Source URL: http://www.laborrights.org/creating-a-sweatfree-world/sweatshops/sweatfree-dc/news/11856

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