



Human Rights Now

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Agenda Item 3: WG on transnational corporations and human rights

Cambodia and China: Labour Exploitation in the Clothing Industry - Responsibility of International Apparel Brands

Human Rights Now is gravely concerned about ongoing labor rights violations in China and Southeast Asia.

In 2014, HRN conducted a joint investigation into factory working conditions in China, focusing on two manufacturers of the Japanese brand UNIQLO.¹ The Investigation found excessive / illegal overtime work, low salary, dangerous working environment, and denial of trade union activity. Workers are only paid minimum wage far from living wage, and must work excessive overtime to supplement their incomes. Workers also endure dangerous conditions like excessive temperatures, use of chemicals without proper ventilation, and inadequate sanitation.

In February 2015, HRN conducted another investigation over labour rights in Cambodian garment factories and found similar violations. The interviews reveal that the factory workers' overtime hours are more than double the daily limit under Cambodian law. Sometimes workers are even compelled to work 24-hour shifts, sometimes consecutively. However, workers are not paid any compensation for overtime work. According to the workers, the factories in question are indeed suppliers of international brands, such as H&M, Marks and Spencer, and Fast Retailing.

Our investigations reveal both the Cambodian and Chinese governments fail to implement domestic labour law and international labour standard. We urges both governments to strengthen efforts to enforce their labour laws and provide effective mechanisms to ensure workers' fundamental rights.

Also, corporations working with abusive manufacturers must also be accountable. The U.N. Guiding Principle on Business and Human Rights obligates business enterprises to prevent or mitigate human rights abuses resulting from their business relationships HRN urges international brands to cooperate with their suppliers to eliminate labor rights violations pursuant to international human rights and labor standards.

¹ See SACOM/ HRN UNIQLO Report available at: <http://hrn.or.jp/activity/event/ngo-4/>