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Joint request for disclosure of human rights policies in the Japanese fashion and sportswear industries

Human Rights Now, an international human rights NGO based in Tokyo, and Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, an international human rights NGO based in the U.K., are conducting a survey of the top 60 apparel companies, as well as their supply chains, with regards to their corporate policies concerning human rights and its enforcement.

A questionnaire has been sent to companies, and they have been given a period of one month to respond. The responses will be published by the end of September 2018.

Ever since the Rana Plaza disaster that occurred in Bangladesh in 2013, issues that occur in the supply chains of the apparel industry, such as child labour, forced labour, and labour in violation of ILO conventions, have been recognized as in a serious state, and Western countries have already promoted implementation of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Although similar efforts have been initiated by some Japanese companies, in Japan the legal system around disclosure of non-financial information (ESG) has not yet been established as it has been in European countries, and current frameworks such as the Corporate Governance Code do not require strict ESG disclosure. Hence, there is not sufficient disclosure of the human rights policies that companies have adopted nor of whether or not such policies are being properly enforced.

Notwithstanding the international attention given to ESG investments, without necessary information being disclosed, especially regarding companies' human rights policies and their enforcement, consumers and investors will be forced to make decisions without considering whether a company's, or group's products are ethical or worthy of purchasing or investing in.

With hopes that the government will establish a framework for proper disclosure of ESG information, we are conducting this survey of the apparel and sportswear industries, the supply chains of which have become beset by pronounced human rights issues. Our expected outcome of this survey is a picture of the current situation which facilitates a fair and transparent industry by promoting the disclosure of companies' human rights policies and their implementation as well as approaches regarding ESG.

With the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics being held in less than two years, consumers, investors, and media from all over the world will be paying particular attention into whether or not respect for human rights, as reflected in the Olympic Charter, is given enough attention by Olympic and Paralympic-related industries in Japan.

We have the highest expectation for the apparel and sportswear industries that they respond to this questionnaire sincerely and that they fulfill their accountability to society.