

Beijing Olympics: IOC Called Upon to Act on Abuses in Chinese Olympics Suppliers

Monday, 11 June 2007

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New Report Details Severe Workers' Rights Violations in Several Chinese Factories

Brussels, 7 June 2007: On the eve of an International Olympic Committee (IOC) meeting in London, a new report "No medal for the Olympics on labour rights " released today by the PlayFair 2008 campaign group exposes gross violations of basic labour standards by several Chinese factories supplying goods under license for the Beijing Olympics, including adult wages at half the legal minimum, employment of workers as young as 12 years old, and employees made to work 12-hour shifts seven days a week in unsafe and unhealthy conditions. With freedom of association banned in China, the workers lack any effective means to defend their rights.

PlayFair 2008 researchers carried out interviews and investigations in early 2007 in four factories making Olympics licensed bags, headgear, stationery and other products. The companies are Lekit Stationary Co, Mainland Headwear Holdings Ltd, Eagle Leather Products, and Yue Wing Cheong Light Products. The report also reveals labour rights violations such as forced overtime, workers being instructed to lie about wages and conditions to outside inspectors, poor health and safety conditions, workers required to work 30 days per month and employers falsifying employment records.

"We're so exhausted, trying to get the "Olympic bags" done in time! To hell with the Olympics product, I am so tired" said one worker interviewed by PlayFair 2008.

The PlayFair 2008 organisations have since the Athens 2004 Games tried to get the International Olympics Committee to put worker rights standards into Olympics supply chain contracts, as set out in the new report, however the IOC has refused to do so.

"Licensing of the Olympics brand is a major source of income for the IOC and national Olympics committees, and it brings shame on the whole Olympics movement that such severe violations of international labour standards are taking place in Olympics-licensed factories" said Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation, a PlayFair 2008 Campaign partner along with the global union Federation the International Textile, Leather and Garment Workers' Federation (ITGLWF) and the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC).

"Children as young as 12 years old working 15 hours a day. Workers cheated of more than half their legal wages. All working till they drop making Beijing Olympics related products. This isn't sport! It begs the question if IOC actually means 'Ignoring Outrageous Conditions' rather than 'International Olympic Committee'", said ITGLWF General Secretary Neil Kearney.

The IOC imposes a range of strict conditions on licensees, however these do not include requirements to respect fundamental labour standards. Beijing Games licensing is expected to generate some US\$70million in income to the Olympics - 40% more than for the 2000 Sydney Games. Broadcast rights, sponsorship deals and ticket sales are other major sources of Olympics revenue, and substantial profits are also expected to be made through the sale of other Olympics-related merchandise.

"PlayFair 2008 is ready at any time to enter serious discussions with the IOC on establishing an effective mechanism to protect workers being exploited in Olympics-related production," said Ineke Zeldenrust of the CCC International Secretariat. "The IOC has been silent on these issues too long and we will be actively campaigning to get them to take action. As the organizer of the biggest global sports-event they should also use their authority to support full respect for fundamental workers' rights in the sporting goods sector overall."

"The IOC's refusal to ensure internationally recognised core labour standards on freedom of association at Olympic-licensed factories is in direct conflict with the Olympic spirit of fair competition. The horrendous conditions faced by Chinese workers working on Olympic products puts the IOC and the Chinese Government to shame," said Lee Cheuk Yan, General Secretary of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions.

Prior to publishing the report, PlayFair 2008 sent a copy to the IOC at its Lausanne Headquarters, calling again for the IOC to adopt and implement effective mechanisms throughout Olympics licensing and supply contracts to ensure respect for fundamental labour standards. In the previous discussions between PlayFair and the IOC, the IOC rejected the Play Fair proposals, and to date has no effective mechanism at all to protect workers being exploited in Olympics-related production.

"We warned the IOC at the time that failure to take the necessary action on labour standards would lead to situations

such as those identified in the report, bringing lasting damage to the name and reputation of the Olympic movement. Unfortunately, they chose not to take action. This should not happen again", said Ryder.

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