

harvard students against sweatshops

www.sweatfreeharvard.org

◆ WHAT IS HARVARD'S RELATIONSHIP TO SWEATSHOPS?

Harvard decides who can make products with the Harvard name through its licensing office. Much of the clothing that bears the Harvard name is made in sweatshops – mostly located in the United States, Central America, and Southeast Asia -- where workers are paid pennies an hour, where there are no health and safety rules, and where advocating for better conditions can get you fired. The prevalence of abuses in factories that produce Harvard apparel was confirmed by the Independent University Initiative, a Harvard-sponsored investigation of factory wages and working conditions in seven countries.

◆ WHAT EXACTLY IS A SWEATSHOP?

Sweatshops are factories where workers work absurd hours – often twelve hours or more each day – for wages as low as pennies an hour. Sweatshops are characterized by hazardous and hostile working conditions. The Independent University Initiative, commissioned by Harvard and five other colleges in 1999 to investigate the conditions of factories that produce collegiate apparel (including official Harvard clothing), discovered that the following abuses are commonplace:

- **Violations of regulations on working time and overtime compensation** – Workers are forced to work more hours per week than is permitted by law and are not paid overtime compensation.
- **Limitations to freedom of association and collective bargaining** – Workers who are courageous enough to unionize are fired, harassed, or worse.
- **Discrimination Against Women** – In most sweatshops, approximately 90-95% of laborers are women, most between the ages of 15 and 24. These women are often subject to sexual harassment or physical abuse by their male supervisors, and at times are even forced to take birth control and forced to abort or resign if they become pregnant.
- **Widespread Health and Safety Problems** – These range from workers being denied use of the bathroom during a twelve-hour working shift to being forced to work with dangerous tools or carcinogenic chemicals, without training or protection.

◆ WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF HARVARD STUDENTS AGAINST SWEATSHOPS?

Schools across the country have adopted codes of conduct for licensees and their subcontractors, which guarantee the right of workers to organize and set minimum standards for wages and working conditions in the factories that produce collegiate apparel. Harvard Students Against Sweatshops worked closely with University lawyers to draft an extremely strong Code of Conduct, but Harvard has yet to ratify or implement the Code. Our primary goals are for Harvard to ratify this Code of Conduct, as well as join the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC), the only monitoring organization that will inspect the factories that produce Harvard apparel to ensure the Code is effectively implemented. More broadly, we also seek to ensure that Harvard fulfills the promises outlined in its August 2002 “Statement of Values,” which declares its commitment to “uphold certain basic values of the community [including] [r]espect for the rights, differences, and dignity of others.” The current treatment of factory workers clearly violates these ideals.

◆ WHAT IS THE WORKER RIGHTS CONSORTIUM?

The Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) is a non-profit anti-sweatshop monitoring organization that inspects factories abroad to ensure that workers are paid and treated fairly by their employers. Unlike other sweatshop monitoring organizations, the WRC fully discloses the results of their investigations to the public, and all investigations are done by trained representatives from respected human rights organizations and other non-profit groups. The WRC is also the only anti-sweatshop group actually endorsed by local unions and worker advocacy groups in the developing nations where these sweatshops exist. As of October 18, 2002, over 100 schools nationwide had joined the WRC, including Columbia, Cornell, and Brown Universities.

◆ HAS HARVARD TAKEN ANY ACTION AGAINST SWEATSHOPS?

Besides commissioning the Independent University Initiative, Harvard has joined the “Fair Labor Association” (FLA), a corporate-dominated organization run by sweatshop-abusers like Nike and Adidas. Unlike the WRC, the FLA uses corporate (for-profit) monitors, refuses to disclose the names of factories it monitors, and visits factories as infrequently as once every ten years. For this reason, the FLA is often regarded as illegitimate, and is not a sufficient solution to the serious problems in Harvard’s sweatshops.

On the other hand, the WRC is a fully transparent organization which releases public reports about the factories it monitors, which has strong women’s rights provisions, and which guarantees the right of workers to form unions. Moreover, the WRC uses only not-for-profit monitors and visits factories unannounced to ensure that management does not hide abuses.



◆ HOW CAN I LEARN MORE AND GET INVOLVED?

Visit www.sweatfreeharvard.org for more information, and sign our petition for Harvard to join the WRC!

If you are interested in becoming involved with HSAS, please contact us at pslm@hcs.harvard.edu to find out our next meeting time.