

# **Sweatshop workers call on Governors to follow Rendell's lead in historic sweatfree commitment during National Governors' Association meeting**

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## **First-in-the-nation commitment receives applause at rally with religious leaders, human rights groups, students and labor groups who invite other governors to follow suit**

Philadelphia — Representatives from human rights, religious, labor, and student groups gathered from around the country today outside with National Governors Association centennial meeting to welcome Governor Edward G. Rendell's historic commitment to end tax dollar support for sweatshops and to encourage all other governors to follow suit.

Late Friday Governor Rendell signed a landmark, first-in-the-nation resolution committing the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to participate in the State and Local Government Sweatfree Consortium. The Sweatfree Consortium will help state and local governments enforce their commitments to end public purchasing from sweatshops by investigating factories and engaging in cooperative purchasing from vendors and factories that meet Consortium standards for labor and human rights.

"We congratulate Governor Rendell and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for stewarding this major advance in the fight against sweatshops," said Bjorn Claeson, Executive Director of SweatFree Communities. "With Governor Rendell poised to become the next Chair of the National Governors Association, we look forward to him encouraging other governors to join the Sweatfree Consortium."

Earlier in the day, human rights activists and garment workers from Bangladesh, Saipan, and the U.S. offered testimony to a panel of community leaders at the Philadelphia Workers' Rights Board Hearing.

"I work at a factory that's a government contractor, where there are poor working conditions, poverty wages, and a lack of meaningful benefits, but I have hope that these

things will improve when states and cities join the Sweatfree Consortium," Elisa Rios, a garment worker at Eagle Industries in Massachusetts, said in her testimony to the Board.

State and local governments spend billions of dollars annually on uniforms for public employees and other apparel, most of which currently are made in sweatshops. A report released July 1 by SweatFree Communities detailed severe human rights and labor rights violations in a dozen factories in nine countries producing apparel for eight major uniform brands that supply state and local governments in the U.S.

"Taxpayer funds should not be used to support sweatshops that profit from the sale of goods while workers are denied basic human rights," Governor Rendell said in a statement. "State and local governments represent a major consumer block, by committing to stop the purchase of goods made in sweatshops we can drive companies to improve working conditions."

In March 2004 Governor Rendell signed Executive Order 2004-4, the Anti-Sweatshop Procurement Policy. Currently 181 public entities, including seven states, have similar sweatfree purchasing policies. The Sweatfree Consortium would enable these governments and others to enforce their policies in a cost effective way. Governor Rendell and the Pennsylvania Department of General Services helped develop the idea for the Sweatfree Consortium along with other government officials and human rights advocates, including SweatFree Communities.

"How the government spends our tax dollars is a reflection of our national morals," said Bishop Dwayne D. Royster, chair of the Philadelphia Jobs with Justice Interfaith Worker Justice and a member of the Workers' Rights Board who presided over today's hearing. "The call to end tax dollar support for sweatshops is a call to our conscience to reflect the good that America should represent."

Activists from more than a dozen states carried signs at the rally calling on their governors to join the Sweatfree Consortium. Signs also read, "Thank you Governor Rendell" and "No Tax Dollar Support for Sweatshops."

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**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](http://www.sweatfree.org)

**The State and Local Government Sweatfree Consortium** will facilitate sweatfree purchasing policy enforcement by pooling resources, sharing knowledge and expertise, and coordinating standards and code compliance activities. Learn more at [www.sweatfree.org/sweatfreeconsortium](http://www.sweatfree.org/sweatfreeconsortium)