

Agreement Reached with Forever 21

December 2004

Forever 21, Inc., the Garment Worker Center, Sweatshop Watch, and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, on behalf of several Los Angeles garment workers represented by it, have reached an agreement to resolve all litigation between them. In addition, the parties have agreed to take steps to promote greater worker protection in the local garment industry. The parties are pleased to announce the resolution of this matter as a positive and symbolic step forward in demonstrating respect and appreciation for garment workers. Under the parties' agreement, the national boycott of Forever 21 and related protests at the Company's retail stores, initiated by the Garment Worker Center in 2001, have ended. The parties share a belief that garment workers should labor in lawful conditions and should be treated fairly and with dignity. Forever 21, the Garment Worker Center and Sweatshop Watch all remain committed to ensuring that the clothing Forever 21 sells in its stores is made under lawful conditions.



SWEATSHOP

WATCH™

Connecting you to
worker struggles in the
garment industry!

Summer 2002 Vol. 8, No. 2

New Garment Workers Join Forever 21 Campaign

Eight more garment workers have joined the Forever 21 campaign. They labored in 9 different sweatshops around downtown Los Angeles and sewed clothing with the Forever 21 label. These workers suffered similar abuses as the 19 workers who filed a lawsuit against Forever 21 in September 2001:

- subminimum wages,
- no overtime pay, and
- dirty and unsafe factories.

"I joined this campaign because I don't want the same to happen to others," says Maria Maura Colorado, a garment worker who recently joined the campaign against Forever 21. "I've sewn clothes with the Forever 21 label in three different factories in downtown Los Angeles. In one place I was given a check without funds, and in all I worked many hours but earned very little."

The campaign now includes 27 garment workers who sewed the Forever 21 label in 15 different factories in Los Angeles. The workers describe how Forever 21 systematically selects and uses manufacturers and contractors that perpetuate sweatshop conditions. Even though workers who sewed the Forever 21 label have brought sweatshop issues to the retailer's attention since last year, Forever 21 continues to refuse to take responsibility for improving the working conditions in the factories that sew its clothing.



The worker-led boycott against Forever 21 continues with regular protests at its stores.

Photo courtesy of the Garment Worker Center.

A Victory for Workers' Free Speech

On March 6, 2002, Forever 21 filed a defamation lawsuit against the 19 original garment workers, the Garment Worker Center (GWC), Sweatshop Watch, and the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) as well as GWC Director Kimi Lee, GWC Organizer Joann Lo, and Sweatshop Watch Co-Director Victor Narro. The

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Forever 21—continued

lawsuit alleges libel and interference with business advantage, claiming that Forever 21 has lost business due to the workers' and advocates' speaking out against its sweatshop practices.

With much pressure from students and community supporters who called and sent letters to Forever 21, the retailer withdrew the lawsuit against the workers a month later in April, but is continuing the suit against the advocates.

"I joined this campaign because I don't want the same to happen to others" —*Maria Maura Colorado, a garment worker*

Keeping Strong

The workers are determined to continue organizing and fighting for justice not only for themselves but also for hundreds, maybe thousands, of workers who continue to sew the Forever 21 label and suffer in sweatshops. GWC members say they have seen the Forever 21 label in many factories throughout downtown Los Angeles.

What You Can Do

The workers have scheduled protests almost every Saturday this summer and are beginning to plan a national speaking tour in October to gain more support for their campaign.

♦ **Sponsor an event in your town with the Forever 21 Campaign. Contact Kimi Lee at the Garment Worker Center at 213-748-5866.**

♦ **Join the workers at one of their protests if you live in and around Los Angeles.**

In July, 3:30pm outside Santa Monica Place, 3rd St. Promenade and Broadway—July 6 (joint protest with bebe workers), July 13, & July 20

In August, 3:00pm outside the Beverly Center, on La Cienega Blvd. between 3rd St. and Beverly Blvd.—August 3, 10, & 17

Staff Updates

We are pleased to welcome Sally Pai as the Asian Worker Organizer of the Garment Worker Center. Sally plans to attend law school in the Fall, so the Garment Worker Center is seeking a permanent Asian Worker Organizer, as well as a Case Manager/Health Educator. Please visit www.sweatshopwatch.org for job announcements or call 213-748-5866.

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Mission Statement:

Sweatshop Watch is a coalition of labor, community, civil rights, immigrant rights, women's, religious & student organizations, and individuals committed to eliminating sweatshop conditions in the global garment industry. We believe that workers should be earning a living wage in a safe and decent working environment, and that those who benefit the most from the exploitation of sweatshop workers must be held accountable.

Sweatshop Watch's newsletter is published quarterly. Membership dues, which include a subscription, are \$20.

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Commentaries, articles, and letters are welcome and should be accompanied with your name, address, and telephone or email.

Workers Prepare to Take Leadership in the Garment Worker Center

Following a retreat in February 2002 and further discussions, Chinese and Latino garment workers who have been participating in the Garment Worker Center (GWC) in Los Angeles have developed a membership structure and a proposal for a Worker Board of GWC. Elections for the Worker Board will take place in September 2002.

“More workers should join the Garment Worker Center because then we’ll be more powerful against the employers and retailers,” says Shu Lan Dong, a member of GWC. Mrs. Dong is talking to other Chinese workers to invite them to join GWC.

Workers decided on the benefits and the responsibilities of being a member of GWC. Benefits include free trainings and workshops to learn about their rights; receiving help with wage claims, discrimination complaints, and retaliatory firings; and participating in the fight for legalization of immigrants.

The workers also felt it was important to point out benefits they already have received, such as personal development, including being able to speak in front of a group and helping to develop strategic plans.

“Before I became involved with the Center, I always felt nervous speaking in front of a lot of people,” says Martin Martinez, another member of GWC. “Now I am very comfortable and I represent the Center in MIWON (Multi-Ethnic Immigrant Worker Organizing Network).”

Responsibilities of membership that the workers decided upon include motivating other garment workers to come and participate in GWC, supporting and caring about GWC, and participating in the activities of GWC.

During the month of June, Chinese and Latino members will review a proposal for the Worker Board that was developed by a small committee of workers. To ensure that the Board is representative of Los Angeles’ garment workforce, the proposal requires that 3 members of the Board be Asian and 6 Latino, as well as



Workers and Garment Worker Center staff gather for the first annual worker retreat in February 2002. Photo courtesy of the Garment Worker Center.

encourages more women to run for the Board.

Some of the responsibilities of the Worker Board include motivating the general membership, delegating responsibilities to the members so that they are involved, and helping to decide the programs and projects of GWC.

The proposal also calls for the creation of six committees to be headed by members of the Worker Board and composed of general members:

- Organizing campaign committee (such as Forever 21 Boycott)
- Membership and recruitment committee
- MIWON committee
- Education committee
- Dues committee
- Social and cultural events committee
- Discipline committee—to help resolve problems between members

“I feel that this is a very exciting time for GWC,” says Joann Lo, an organizer at GWC. “Since GWC opened, we’ve wanted to ensure that the workers have a more formal voice in the direction and planning of GWC and now it’s happening.”

“More workers should join the Garment Worker Center because then we’ll be more powerful against the employers and retailers”—Shu Lan Dong, a GWC member

CAMPAIGN UPDATES



15,000 rally in Los Angeles on International Workers Day

Photo courtesy of the Garment Worker Center.



“Bush Escucha, estamos en la lucha!” was one of the many chants heard as roughly 15,000 people marched to the federal building through one of the busiest streets in downtown Los Angeles on International Workers Day, May 1, 2002. Now an annual event, organized by the Multi-Ethnic Immigrant Worker Organizing Network (MIWON), the march brought together diverse sectors of immigrants, powerfully displaying the strength and conviction present within Los Angeles’ immigrant communities.

Similar to last year, the main thrust of the march was to demand a broad legalization program for all undocumented immigrants. This year however, MIWON added to its principal demands an end to immigrant bashing, a clear response to tightened national security since September 11th, which has translated into the repression and intimidation of immigrant communities through such tactics as INS raids at airports and worksites. The thousands that came out for the march were proof that the immigrant community refuses to be scapegoated, carrying signs that read, “We are workers, not terrorists!”

MIWON will continue to push for legalization through lobbying and grassroots efforts, which includes their work to pass a bill that would allow undocumented immigrants to obtain driver’s licenses. For more information, call MIWON at 213-353-1781.



Saipan Garment Workers Win Important Breakthrough

In May, Judge Munson in Saipan issued two important rulings in the Saipan sweatshop lawsuits. First, he ruled that thousands of former and current Saipan garment workers could sue the retailers and their contracted factories as a class. The workers allege that the retailers and factories engaged in a system of indentured labor. Second, he preliminarily approved the \$8.75 million settlements by 19 retailers, which the Gap and others have been trying to block. The settlement includes payments to workers and the establishment of an independent monitoring program that will prevent future labor abuses in Saipan garment factories.

Please continue to send letters to the remaining companies who have not settled the Saipan lawsuits. Their addresses and fax numbers are at www.sweatshopwatch.org/marianas/help.html.

- Gap, Inc.
- Dayton-Hudson/Associated Merchandising Corp. (Target and Mervyn's)
- J.C. Penney Company, Inc.
- Lane Bryant, Inc. (The Limited)
- Levi's Strauss & Co.
- The Talbots, Inc.
- Abercrombie and Fitch Co.



Samoa Garment Workers Win Class-Action Lawsuit

In April, 270 Vietnamese and Chinese workers who labored in the Daewoosa garment factory on American Samoa won an important legal victory. The High Court of American Samoa ordered the factory to pay \$3.5 million to the workers. That amounts to an average award of \$13,000 to each worker—more than twice what many of them earned in a year at the factory. The workers paid \$3,000-7,000 to get their jobs, and were then often paid below minimum wage and without overtime pay. They also went unpaid for several weeks at a time; faced threats, intimidation and violence; endured poor health and safety conditions; and were withheld food for two days after refusing to work until they were paid.



Mexmode Union Signs Contract

In April, the SITEMEX union in the Mexmode garment factory (formerly called Kuk Dong) in Atlixco, Mexico signed a collective bargaining agreement. The contract provides a 10% wage increase, a 5% increase in benefits and an attendance bonus, increasing the workers’ overall take home pay up to 40% each week. SITEMEX is the only independent union with a contract in Mexico’s maquiladoras. The factory produces sweatshirts for Nike, who recently agreed to resume orders to the factory after international pressure.

For campaign background, please see past Sweatshop Watch newsletters or visit www.sweatshopwatch.org.



San Francisco's Wins Garment Workers Keep Up Campaign for Justice

On Tax Day—April 15, garment workers from San Francisco's Wins factories rallied to urge the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) not to rob them of their hard-earned wages. Owners of the Wins of California factory exploited their workers and evaded their taxes, then claimed bankruptcy. The garment workers—over 250 monolingual Chinese immigrants—are caught in a complex legal battle fighting for over \$1 million in unpaid wages, while the IRS seeks the factory's taxes from a pot of money collected by the U.S. Department of Labor intended to pay the workers. Meanwhile, G.E. Capital, who financed Wins' operations, is also claiming the money. The Bankruptcy Trustee sued the Department of Labor claiming the "lock box" money is part of the Wins estate and that the DOL has no right to distribute the funds to Wins' former employees.



Photo by Scott Louie.

On June 19, the workers won a victory when the Bankruptcy Judge dismissed the Trustee's action against the Department of Labor. The workers are continuing their campaign for justice by meeting with politicians to gain their support, making presentations to students and community groups, and organizing actions. To get involved, contact the Chinese Workers Organizing Center/Chinese Progressive Association 415-391-6986 or visit www.sweatshopwatch.org/wins.



Los Angeles Garment Workers File Second Lawsuit Against Bebe For Sweatshop Abuses

On May 23, 2002, Los Angeles garment workers represented by the Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC) announced a federal lawsuit against Bebe Stores, Inc. This is the second lawsuit in six months against Bebe alleging that Bebe engages in a pattern and practice of selecting, using, demanding and perpetuating sweatshops.

The five garment workers involved in the case initially came to the Garment Worker Center for help when the factory they sewed for, S&W Manufacture, Inc., closed down. Some of them have been working at S&W for as long as eight years. All are left without any benefits, health care, and even their most basic wages. Bik Wan Kwan Chan, one of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit who worked at S&W on Bebe garments, said, "Bebe paid whatever it wanted. The factory could not make money based on the prices Bebe set, so we could not be paid legally." Ms. Chan has worked in the garment industry for 20 years.



\$118

2001 Gross Profit=\$290.8 Million
2001 Total Assets=\$174.7 Billion

Before APALC's announcement of the second lawsuit, Bebe offered to settle for only wages for the workers in the first and second lawsuits. The twelve workers' consensus was to reject the offer and go forward with the lawsuits, even after they learned that the lawsuits may be a long, hard battle.

Take Action!

Call Bebe and tell them to settle the lawsuits against them and pay the workers who sewed their clothes.

You can reach Bebe at 877-bebe-777 (877-232-3777) or

askus@bebe.com. For more information, visit

www.sweatshopwatch.org/bebe.

learn more by visiting:

www.sweatshopwatch.org

ILO Issues Report on Child Labor Around the Globe

In May 2002, the International Labor Organization (ILO) issued "A Future Without Child Labor," a comprehensive study of nearly 70 countries which shows that despite significant progress in efforts to abolish child labor, an alarming number of children are trapped in its worst forms.

The report found that 246 million children—one in every six children aged 5 to 17—are involved in child labor. The report also found that one in every eight children in the world—179 million children aged 5 to 17—is still exposed to the worst forms of child labor which endanger the child's physical, mental or moral well-being.

A Global Phenomenon

Child labor continues to be a global phenomenon, in which no country or region is immune, the report says. A wide range of crises—including natural disasters, sharp economic downturns, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and armed conflicts—increasingly draws the young into debilitating child labor, including illegal and clandestine forms such as prostitution, drug trafficking, pornography and other illicit activities.

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In terms of geographical distribution, the Asia-Pacific region harbors the largest absolute number of working children between the ages of 5 and 14, with some 127 million or 60% of the world total. Sub-Saharan Africa is second with 48 million, or 23% of the total, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean with 17.4 million or 8%, and Middle East and North Africa with 13.4 million or 6%. About 2.5 million, or 1% of the world's child laborers, are in the industrialized countries, while another 2.4 million are found in transition economies.

Surveys in developing countries indicate that the vast majority (70%) of children who work are engaged in such primary sectors as agriculture, fishing, hunting and forestry. Some 8% are involved in manufacturing and wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels; 7% in domestic work and services; 4% in transport, storage and communication; and 3% in construction, mining and quarrying.

Child labor often assumes serious proportions in commercial agriculture associated with global markets for cocoa, coffee, cotton, rubber, sisal, tea and other commodities. Studies in Brazil, Kenya and Mexico have shown that children under 15 make up between 25 to 30% of the total

labor force in the production of various commodities. The report notes that "in many developed countries, agriculture is also the sector in which most children work" and that "family farms are a common exemption from minimum age legislation".

The informal economy, in which workers are not recognized or protected under the legal and regulatory frameworks of the labor market, is where the most child laborers are found.

Working Children, Ages 5 - 14

Region	Number of working children
Asia-Pacific region	127 million
Sub-Saharan Africa	48 million
Latin America & Caribbean	17.4 million
Middle East & North Africa	13.4 million

Complex Causes & Solutions

The report lists the many causes of child labor, all of which must be addressed. While poverty is a major factor, there are many other related causes such as economic and political instability, discrimination, migration, criminal exploitation, traditional cultural practices, a lack of decent work for adults, inadequate social protection, a lack of schools and the desire for consumer goods.

On the demand side, factors include a lack of law enforcement, the desire on the part of some employers for a cheap and flexible workforce and the low profitability and productivity of small-scale, family enterprises which cannot afford adult paid labor.

In spite of the difficulty of addressing all these causes, the ILO report insists that "the campaign for universal ratification of Convention No. 182 has given the general fight against child labor a new urgency and scope, by focusing world attention on its worst forms". Since its unanimous adoption by the International Labor Conference in 1999, Convention No. 182 has been ratified by nearly 120 of the ILO's 175 member States. In addition, the ILO Minimum Age Convention No. 138, adopted in 1973, has been ratified by 116 member States as of April 2002. The United States has ratified Convention No. 182, but not No. 138.

To find out about organizations working on child labor issues, visit www.sweatshopwatch.org/campaigns.

Source: International Labor Organization - www.ilo.org

Express Yourself!!!

Please express your views on sweatshops! Submit poems, stories, illustrations, and other creative works which you would like us to consider publishing. Mail works to: Sweatshop Watch, 310 Eighth Street, Suite 303, Oakland, CA 94607. Please, let us know if you would like your work returned.

Woman

By Andrea Townsend

In this world a woman is not a woman
She is hands
She is a short breath of stale air
She is lungs raked by flyaway fibers
And a raw nose and eyes dripping from glue fumes

A woman is not a woman in a world like this
She is numbers on clothing, 50% cotton, 50% polyester...
A word in someone else's language

A woman cannot be a woman
It's against regulations
Only when the late night supervisors overstep their boundaries
Then she is a woman for a moment, in his eyes
Beneath his rough hands
Never under her own

These hands bleed,
So that people can love their children in the "American" way
Curl them up with a plush toy in a warm home
While her children curl up with the night

A woman is not a woman
She is hours of labor
Hours of sitting,
Her back bent like a willow in a windstorm

In every second, minute, hour, day—she becomes the whirl of machinery
Years go by and she is a sound,
A breath,
A thrumming pattern
A needle charging across fabric, a suspended heartbeat

Then, all at once and slowly
A whisper rises through the state air, the dim light,
Cuts through the ceaseless mechanical droning
And a hand slows its perpetual motion,
Stretches slowly across the space between the machine and the woman

Down the rows of workbenches,
One by one, these hands close over one another
Become clenched fists
Remind themselves that they are not just hands.
They are women.

Andrea Townsend was an 11th grade student at Franklin High School in Portland, Oregon when she wrote this poem.

RESOURCES

♦ **Rethinking Globalization: Teaching for Justice in an Unjust World** is a new resource on globalization with role plays, interviews, poetry, stories, background readings, hands-on teaching tools and more. Available for \$18.95 plus shipping from Rethinking Schools at 1-800-669-4192 or www.rethinkingschools.org.

♦ **From the Household to the Factory: Sex Discrimination in the Guatemalan Labor Force** is a recent report by Human Rights Watch available at www.hrw.org.

♦ **First Synthesis Report on the Working Conditions Situation in Cambodia's Garment Sector** is a recent report by the International Labor Organization, which is conducting comprehensive audits of 190 garment factories in Cambodia as part of the "Garment Sector Working Conditions Improvement Project" related to the US-Cambodia trade agreement. Available at bravo.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/cambodia.htm.

♦ **China Capacity Building Project: Occupational Health and Safety** is the final report from the just-concluded health and safety project in three footwear plants in the Pearl River Delta of China. The project involved a training and the establishment of plant-wide health and safety committees with workers as full and active participants in Taiwanese contract factories producing sports shoes for adidas, Nike and Reebok. Available from the Maquiladora Health & Safety Support Network at www.igc.org/mhssn.

♦ **LOOSE THREADS: After a decade of organizing, anti-sweatshop activists say it's time they pulled together** is a new report which includes descriptions of more than 20 anti-sweatshop organizations. Available from the Resource Center for the Americas at www.americas.org.

Working Assets will donate over \$4 million to 50 nonprofits, including Sweatshop Watch.

If you are a Working Assets long distance or credit card customer, you can support our work by voting for us on your Working Assets Donation Ballot by **December 31, 2002**. *The grant allocation is determined solely by the number of votes each organization receives.*



To learn more about Working Assets, visit www.workingforchange.com or call 800-788-8858.

To receive additional copies of this newsletter, or back issues, please contact Sweatshop Watch at 510-834-8990 or visit our web site at:

www.sweatshopwatch.org



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Join Sweatshop Watch!

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Yes! I want to join Sweatshop Watch. Enclosed is my \$20 membership.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Make checks payable and send to:
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