

Governor Rendell Announces Coalition of States Against Sweatshop Labor; Encourages Nation's Governors to Sign-On

Press Release

Source: Pennsylvania Office of the Governor

Saturday September 16, 1:00 pm E

Joins Maine, New Jersey to Battle Inhumane Labor Practices

HARRISBURG, Pa., Sept. 16 /PRNewswire/ -- Governor Edward G. Rendell said today that Pennsylvania is taking a leading role to eliminate sweatshops and cruel working conditions around the world, while leveling the playing field for businesses that treat employees fairly and pay a fair wage.

The Governor signed a resolution joining a consortium of states that will reward responsible companies and industries that disavow controversial tactics, identify and implement best management practices, and develop responsible means to monitor progress towards these goals.

"In the last decade, as the global economy has evolved, companies have found themselves under increasing pressure to cut costs and compete," said Governor Rendell. "Unfortunately, in an effort to attract additional foreign investment and grow, some of these firms have engaged in despicable practices that degrade and discount the value of their employees in the name of profits. The practice of using sweatshops is a race to the bottom that we cannot condone and must eliminate."

In signing the resolution, the Governor committed Pennsylvania to a group that includes Maine and New Jersey. Governors John Baldacci (Maine) and Jon Corzine (NJ) have also signed the agreement.

"By using our combined state procurement power, we can impart real change," said Governor Rendell. "In Pennsylvania, we've already taken steps to discourage business with companies known to employ sweatshops, but as more and more states come on board, our position will become stronger and harder to get around.

"We have a moral obligation to ensure this practice is not rewarded through state contracts and taxpayer dollars. That's why, along with Governors Baldacci and Corzine, we're encouraging other states to join us and send a clear message that the U.S. values hard-working employees, and expects workers to be treated and compensated fairly."

In March 2004, Governor Rendell signed an executive order barring commonwealth agencies under the Governor's jurisdiction from entering into procurement contracts for apparel and

laundry services with companies that put people to work in sweatshop conditions. The order further said that contractors must certify that employees engaged in these duties are compensated at decent hourly rates, and that they are working in an environment that meets or exceeds the International Labor Organization's workplace standards.

While sweatshops employ men and women of all ages, children are often the victims and suffer lasting physical and psychological effects. According to UNICEF's 2005 State of the World's Children report, 180 million children are now exploited as a source of labor.

The Rendell Administration is committed to creating a first-rate public education system, protecting our most vulnerable citizens and continuing economic investment to support our communities and businesses. To find out more about Governor Rendell's initiatives and to sign up for his weekly newsletter, visit his Web site at: <http://www.governor.state.pa.us>.

CONTACT:
Michael Smith
717-783-1116