BEIJING 2008: TIME FOR CHANGE

It’s Olympics time again. The Olympics brings to mind sports, the five rings… a spirit of fair play.

But not only is it time for sport, it’s also time for profit. Big profits.

The Beijing Olympics may become the most profitable Olympics in the Games’ history. While the marketing income of the Beijing Organising Committee of the Olympic Games has been pegged at over US$1 billion, it’s estimated that the sale of official Beijing Games memorabilia alone will bring in profits of more than US$300 million.

Play Fair 2008: an international campaign taking place in the lead up to the 2008 Olympic Games to push for respect for workers’ rights in the global sporting goods industry.

WHAT’S THE PROBLEM?

Long hours, low wages, threats to health and safety – a range of serious issues that need serious attention.

Play Fair 2008 research documents serious violations of basic labour standards by several Chinese factories supplying goods under licence 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 are difficult to organise, and using violence as a means to defend their rights, researchers say. In some factories, workers are actually forced to work longer hours or paid lower wages.

WHOSE PROBLEM IS IT?

These problems aren’t just something for the women and men who make sportswear or Olympic souvenirs to sort out. It’s industry’s responsibility. Factory owners, brand name sportswear companies and retailers as well as the Olympic movement is. As the main coordinating body for the Olympics, the IOC has the primary responsibility to ensure that national Olympic Committees and the country hosting the Games ensure their licences and sponsors uphold the Olympic ideals.

The IOC has been reluctant to take any concrete action to address the problem of basic labour rights violations where their branded goods are produced. They lie all brands, have the power to push for positive change, but thus far have not addressed these problems in any meaningful way. Organizations participating in the Play Fair campaign have been urging the IOC to take action since 2003. The sportswear industry also needs to do more to ensure respect for the rights of workers throughout their global supply chains.

There’s also a role for athletes and teams who are sponsored by sportswear companies to play in cleaning up the industry. It’s also important that regular consumers who buy this gear speak out against the violation of human rights in the workplace. The sportswear industry and the marketing organisations like the IOC need to know that the people aren’t interested in buying anything made in conditions that are harmful and unjust to workers.

Take Action Now! Demand, sign, and mail this postcard that appears on the next page to the president of the IOC to make clear your feelings that workers’ rights violations have to stop.

According to reports, sportswear giant Adidas paid some US$70 million just to sponsor the Beijing Olympics.

Meanwhile the workers that actually make the goods that bear the Olympic logo aren’t profiting at all. Research into conditions at factories producing Olympic licenced products turned up numerous serious rights violations. The same goes for workers at factories making sportswear.

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