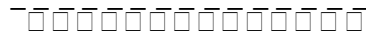


ISSUES AND ACTIONS

August 2004



*This is the first of three articles about some of the issues the Sisters recommended during Annual Assembly. At the same time we will be preparing for the upcoming election through the use of materials from the booklet **Faithful Citizenship**, a statement by the Administrative Committee of the U.S. Conference of Bishops.*



EARTH CHARTER NEWS:

The August issue contains the research on various stores and labor policies.
The September issue will contain Bread for the Journey.
The October issue will be about Fair Trade and will contain a list of resources.

RESEARCH ON STORES AND LABOR POLICIES

You asked: How can we support stores who have good labor policies here and abroad. After searching the Web, we found a gold mine of information on Australian made goods.

The **good news is** that in November last year the Australian Retailers Association had signed a new Retailer Code: the Textile Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia covering the production of clothes made in Australia. Oxfam reports that 34 retailers have now signed the code, including Kmart and Target.

Retailers who sign on to the Code commit to a much higher level of transparency regarding their wholesale chains to those who actually make their Australian-made clothes. In some cases the retailers must provide the union with information on the price they paid for it. The Code also assists the union to take steps that workers who make those clothes are paid decent wages and have decent conditions.

Fair Wear is encouraging Australians to buy from retailers who have signed the Code. Note that at this stage the Code only applies to clothes made in Australia. One of the issues raised was the claims by Oxfam regarding the sweatshop conditions under which sportswear are made.

The **bad news is**: According to the Guardian Newspapers of 3/3/04, sportswear made by Puma, Umbra, File, Adidas, Reebok, Nike and ASICS is being produced by workers around the world whose rights are being regularly violated, according to a major report by Oxfam and trade unions. Ask Puma to restart ordering from the Matamoras factory where workers' trade union rights are respected.

As the big brands gear up to take advantage of the marketing around the Olympic games, most are using factories that ruthlessly exploit their workers the charity claims. It says that the business methods of the leading companies, which have cut order times and reduced prices paid to their suppliers, have resulted in workers being forced into excessively long overtime, sometimes unpaid, and given wages too low to live on.

The report, Play Fair at the Olympics, has been prepared by Oxfam in conjunction with Labor Behind the Label and international trade unions, and is based on interviews with workers producing sports clothes and trainers in seven countries. As well as evidence from the traditional garment-producing countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, China, Cambodia and Bangladesh, research was collected in Bulgaria and Turkey.

Wal-Mart

KLP, one of Norway's largest insurance companies, includes Wal-Mart as one of 27 companies it refuses to do business with because it does not meet its minimal ethical standards, including labor rights conduct. Wal-Mart was removed from the Domini Social Index Fund because of its lack of vendor standards compliance. Wal-Mart is notorious for ignoring federal laws protecting workers' rights of association. Wal-Mart has also been accused in class action suites filed in 30 states of breaking federal overtime laws. In many cases, workers say managers locked the store doors and would not allow workers to leave.

A good start to restoring faith of investors and consumers seriously troubled by Wal-Mart's workers' rights and liabilities would be to implement a basic widely recognized code of conduct for treatment of workers and protection of fundamental human rights.

What can you do:

Shopping and consuming is one of those few areas we ordinary people can make a difference. Every time we shop we should take a moment to look at the labels and find out where our clothing is being made. As with food, we should make an active choice of what we wear.

Ask shop assistants whether they know if the workers who made those shoes or t-shirts were paid and treated properly. They won't know but if enough people ask them they'll ask their managers and the managers will ask the companies they work for. Make a nuisance of yourself.



The Social Concerns Committee would love to hear how others have implemented the Earth Charter principles so that we can share it with the community. Please send c/o Sister Elaine Marie, PO Box 3248, Fremont, CA 94539 or e-mail shfems@sbcglobal.net