
International Labor Rights Forum

Sept-Oct, 2012

CONTENTS:

1. [October 10: Take action at Walmart!](#)
2. [Hershey announces plans to source 100% certified cocoa](#)
3. [Horrific Pakistan fire exposes failures of corporate-controlled monitoring](#)
4. [Gap's new fire safety program excludes worker voice, leaving workers' lives at risk](#)
5. [Positive media attention aside, H&M still pays poverty wage](#)
6. [Is Burma poised to take Bangladesh's sweatshop jobs?](#)
7. [U.S. negotiates trade agreement with Vietnam, despite forced labor](#)
8. [U.S. flower company steals wages from poor Colombians](#)
9. [Airline unions wage global day of action](#)
10. [Child labor revealed on Philippines palm oil plantations](#)

October 10: Take action at Walmart!

Last Thursday, for the first time in Walmart's 50-year history, workers at nine Los Angeles Walmart stores went on strike in protest of unfair labor practices, despite the fact that their jobs are not protected by a labor union. Striking Walmart warehouse workers in Elwood, Illinois, have already met with a first victory: after a 21-day strike and a letter from 100,000 people, the workers won their principal demand for an end to illegal retaliation against workers protesting poor conditions.

Please support Walmart store associates and contracted warehouse workers by participating in the STAND UP, LIVE BETTER Day of Action tomorrow. [Join an event or sign up to deliver a letter to a Walmart near you.](#)



Hershey announces plan to source 100% certified cocoa, after Whole Foods drops Scharffen Berger

Breaking news from our Raise the Bar, Hershey! Campaign: The same day that our online petition about Hershey's child labor abuses led to [Whole Foods dropping Hershey's Scharffen Berger chocolates](#), Hershey announced a plan to source 100% certified cocoa by 2020. [ILRF welcomes this announcement and urges Hershey's to share the details](#) on their new commitment.



Horrific Pakistan fire exposes failures of corporate-controlled monitoring

The death toll due to the [pattern of negligence and unconscionably-low prices](#) paid by global apparel brands to their supplier factories reached an all-time high on September 11th. In the world's largest garment factory fire to date, more than 260 workers died in the blaze at Ali Enterprises jeans factory in Karachi, Pakistan. Among them were illegally employed 13-year olds. Just a month prior, Ali Enterprises received a clean bill of health and certification to Social Accountability International's SA8000 standard. The factory made jeans for major western brands, and yet was not equipped with fire-safety equipment. Exits were locked or blocked, and windows were barred.



Since the tragedy, ILRF has been working closely with unions in Pakistan to support their demands for adequate compensation for victims and improvements in factory safety, and to expose the shortcomings of brands' and auditors' monitoring systems. [A new Workers' Rights Movement formed in Pakistan, and it can already claim a first victory](#) as a result of its court petition and protests: two factory owners were sent to jail on Saturday.

Gap's new safety program excludes worker voice, leaving workers' lives at risk

[After 29 workers were killed at a Gap supplier factory](#) in Bangladesh, in part due to Gap's failure to enforce its own safety standards at the factory, Gap made a public commitment to take meaningful action to protect the lives of the workers in Bangladesh who make Gap clothes. But now, nearly two years later, the company has reneged on that commitment. Instead of working with NGOs and unions to implement an effective fire safety program, Gap has decided to [unilaterally implement an initiative](#) with no legal commitments to workers, no oversight by trade unions or worker organizations, and no transparency.



Positive media attention aside, H&M still pays poverty wage

H&M's CEO Karl-Johan Persson has recently been lauded for asking Bangladesh's Prime Minister to raise the country's minimum wage. Don't be fooled. Even as he did this, he refuses to use his hefty influence to ensure a wage increase for the Bangladeshi workers who sew H&M clothes. [Meanwhile H&M – Bangladesh's largest apparel buyer – is implicated in union repression and labor rights abuses](#) in Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, India, Thailand, Madagascar, and Mauritius. One conversation with a prime minister hardly makes up for systematically perpetrated labor rights abuses. ILRF calls on H&M and other brands to assume their responsibility and to pay fair prices to their suppliers so that workers can receive living wages.



Is Burma poised to take Bangladesh's sweatshop jobs?

With nearly four million garment workers, second only to China in apparel exports, and the industry's cheapest workforce at \$36/month, Bangladesh's rapidly growing garment industry may appear unparalleled. In her [thought-piece for our blog](#), [Bama Athreya](#) brings the future of Bangladesh's garment industry into question and looks at what Burma's future might hold if US import sanctions are dropped. When Bangladesh received similar trade benefits years ago, millions of garment-factory jobs shifted from China to Bangladesh in favor of Bangladesh's lower wages and willingness to overlook health and safety standards. Both Burma and Bangladesh desperately need legitimate governments and legal systems to protect citizens against human rights abuses; both need transparency and accountability to end the profiteering and corruption by government and military officials and cronies. Current policy will not do this for either country. Burma will just learn that it can get a lot for giving very little, and Bangladesh will look next door and conclude that it may pay to let abuses grow even worse.



U.S. negotiates trade agreement with Vietnam, despite forced labor

In state-sponsored drug detention centers all over Vietnam, some 40,000 men, women, and children are being held against their will and forced to work. The victims are held without a hearing or a trial in a court of law on suspicion of using illegal drugs. Many are held for up to five years, often to produce goods for private companies.

As the US Trade Representative negotiates with Vietnam to further open US markets to their products through the Trans-Pacific Partnership, [we call on the USTR to demand that Vietnam permanently close the forced labor centers](#). Last month, ILRF staff, Liana Foxvog and Eric Gottwald, hand-delivered a petition with 6,135 signatures to the USTR at the TPP trade negotiations in Virginia. US government officials have told us that forced labor is "on their list of issues to address with Vietnam." For the sake of the detainees and a fairer trading system, ILRF urges USTR to put forced labor at the top of their list.



U.S. flower company steals wages from poor Colombians

Last month, Falcon Farms, a U.S.-based multinational flower company, illegally suspended 71 workers in Colombia for peacefully protesting the company's failure to pay wages. Only union members were suspended, in direct retaliation for having launched an official complaint with the regional Ministry of Labor regarding the unpaid wages. These are exactly the kinds of employer abuses the government of Colombia promised to address when it recently signed a free trade agreement with the United States. If you haven't yet, please [send a letter to Falcon Farms and the Colombian Ministry of Labor](#) calling for an end to wage theft.



Airline unions wage global day of action

Last fall, ILRF joined the Philippine Airlines Employees' Association (PALEA) in a [boycott against Philippine Airlines \(PAL\)](#), after the airline's ground crew in Manila was locked-out for protesting the contracting-out of jobs. The workers' protest is still going strong and the movement continues to pick up speed. On September 27th, airline unions spanning four continents held a [Global Day of Action against Outsourcing](#). Do you know anyone traveling to the Philippines this holiday season? Urge them to boycott PAL!



Child labor revealed on Philippines palm oil plantations

The Center for Trade Union and Human Rights has [uncovered child labor on palm oil plantations](#) in Caraga, Philippines. The study, which was supported by ILRF, shows that 24% of the plantation workers are children between the ages of 5 to 17. These kids work up to 12 hour days in physically demanding jobs, such as hauling heavy palm fruit bunches and loading them onto trucks. Parents need a living wage and access to livelihood and social services for their families, in order for this sort of child labor to end.

