

Press Release
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Public, private sector to examine better work in global textile sector amid economic crisis

Washington, DC – The impact of the global economic crisis on some 1.2 million developing country textile workers producing goods supplied to multinational retailers is to be discussed here Thursday as part of a review of labour standard compliance and competitiveness in the sector over the past decade.

The discussion, hosted by the joint Better Work Program of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), will be held from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at the IFC Auditorium located at 2121 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W., Washington, D.C. Media are invited to attend.

“Better Work is widely supported by international buyers and local supplies and has made a significant impact on the lives of workers and their families, the performance of enterprises and the economic and social development of the countries involved” stated Ros Harvey, Global Director for the program.

In addition to the impact of the crisis, discussions will also focus on examining work over the past decade to help enterprises improve compliance with international labor standards and competitiveness in their global supply chains.

The meeting coincides with the 10th anniversary of the Textile and Apparel Trade Agreement between the U.S. and Cambodia. Better Work grew from a pilot project in Cambodia which was supported by the U.S. government as part of the textile agreement and now involves manufacturing facilities in Jordan, Haiti, Vietnam and Lesotho.

“The collaboration among government, local industry leaders and international brands continues to be instrumental in reaching the success Better Work Factories and Better Work have experienced in the last 10 years” said Greg Radford, IFC Director for Environment and Social Development “and while millions of workers are benefiting from these commitments, companies are becoming more competitive in the global marketplace and more likely to weather the financial crisis.”

Several of the largest U.S.-based multinational firms in the textile sector are expected to attend to discuss improving labor standards in factories that produce their products, including American Eagle Outfitters, Gap Inc., Jones Apparel, Levi Strauss & Co., Martha Stewart Living, Nike, Polo, Ralph Lauren, Walt Disney, and Wal-mart.

Senior officials from the U.S. Department of Labor, the AFL-CIO and the U.S. Council for International Business will also be participating in the meeting to contribute to a multi-stakeholder perspective. Better Work grew from a pilot project in Cambodia which was supported by the U.S. government as part of the textile agreement.

"The Better Work platform is a model that demonstrates how improvements are possible when the right stakeholders are at the table," Dan Henkle, Senior Vice-President for Social Responsibility at Gap Inc.

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About Better Work

Better Work, a unique partnership between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), aims to improve labour standards and competitiveness in global supply chains. The focus is on scalable and sustainable solutions that build cooperation between government, employers' and workers' organizations, and international buyers. The Better Work global programme is supported by the governments of the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Ireland, Japan, Norway, Luxembourg, Italy, and New Zealand. Better Work country programmes are supported by the governments of the United States, Jordan, Australia, Canada, the European Union, Finland, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. For more information, visit www.betterwork.org

About the ILO

The International Labour Organization was established in 1919 by the Treaty of Versailles and became the first specialized agency of the United Nations system in 1946. Its work in setting and monitoring international labour standards has provided the framework for national labour law and practice in virtually all countries. The ILO's total budget for 2006-2007 is just over US\$900 million, including a regular budget of US\$594 million plus US\$306 million in extra-budgetary funds associated with special technical cooperation projects. For more information, visit www.ilo.org

About IFC

IFC, a member of the World Bank Group, creates opportunity for people to escape poverty and improve their lives. We foster sustainable economic growth in developing countries by supporting private sector development, mobilizing private capital, and providing advisory and risk mitigation services to businesses and governments. Our new investments totaled \$14.5 billion in fiscal 2009, helping channel capital into developing countries during the financial crisis. For more information, visit www.ifc.org.