

Forum: United Nations Human Rights Council

Issue: Enforcing equitable labour laws to combat fast-fashion and proliferation of sweatshops

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Introduction

Recent years have seen a significant expansion of the fast-fashion sector as a result of customer demand for new trends every other week. However, the unsustainable practice of constantly producing new styles in this sector has led to dangerous working conditions, a decline in local production, and a drop in quality. Workers who are underpaid, overworked, and subjected to hazardous working conditions pay a price for the low-cost fashion. The issue is especially severe in developing nations where there are many sweatshops. These workers need the same rights as those in developed countries, notwithstanding the fact that these industries have contributed to the economic growth and employment creation in these nations. Offshore outsourcing is currently unregulated by federal legislation in the United States, and decreasing labour standards can encourage low wages, poor skill levels, and high labour turnover.

Sweatshops are factories or workshops where workers are subjected to poor working conditions, low wages, and long hours. The proliferation of sweatshops has been a growing concern in recent years. Sweatshops are part of the industrialization process and are an inevitable by-product of economic development. Factories in LEDC's are able to attract foreign customers because local labor is cheap. As factories proliferate and employment rises, factories must begin to compete for better workers. Wages therefore increase, and factory conditions improve. However, sweatshops have both social and economic costs including lost wages and taxes and the fostering of organized criminal enterprises including alien smuggling, drug trafficking, money laundering, labor

racketeering, and extortion. Because sweatshops operate in the underground economy, reliable national data on their nature and extent is difficult to obtain. Sweatshops move low-skill workers out of the countryside and into the cities, allowing the country as a whole to benefit. Even though the workers of these factories, many of whom are children, work long hours for little pay, they typically earn more in these industrial jobs, which allows many to escape from extreme poverty.

Definition of Key Terms

fast-fashion

Inexpensive clothing produced rapidly by mass-market retailers in response to the latest trends.

Economic growth

Increase in the production of goods and services in an economy.

Offshore Outsourcing

When an organization recruits a third party supplier to conduct operations from an outside or alternate country.

Proliferation

Rapid increase in the number or amount of something.

Industrialization

The process of transforming the economy of a nation or region from a focus on agriculture to a reliance on manufacturing.

LEDC's

Lower economically developed countries

Organized criminal enterprise

A continuing criminal enterprise that works to profit from illicit or illegal activities that are often in great public demand.

Alien smuggling

Transporting, harboring, aiding individuals illegally crossing into a different nations borders.

Drug trafficking

A global illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacturing, distribution and sale of substances which are subject to drug prohibition laws.

Money laundering

The concealment of the origins of illegally obtained money, typically by the means of transfers of foreign banks or legitimate businesses.

Labour racketeering

Labour racketeering is the illegal infiltration, control, or exploitation of a labour unions or employee benefit plan for personal gain through violent, fraudulent, or illegal means.

Extortion

The practice of obtaining something, typically money, through the means of violence, torture, force, or threats.

Underground economy

The part of the country's economic activity that is unrecorded and untaxed by it's government; the black market.

Key Issues

Exploitation of workers

The fast fashion industry uses low-cost labor to increase profits, which frequently results in the exploitation of laborers in developing nations. These nations frequently have low pay, lengthy workweeks, and unfavorable working conditions for their workforce. Since the 1990s, there has been a substantial rise in the demand for fast fashion in first-world countries. Clothes manufacturers have been able to create this business model by utilizing cheap labor in developing countries, where employees are frequently abused, underpaid, and forced to work in appalling conditions. In order to produce a large amount of apparel at a low cost, the majority of fast fashion businesses are encouraged to use unethical labor

methods by the rapid trend cycle, also known as micro-trending. The industry of fashion

Lack of regulation

Sweatshops and unethical labor practices in the fast fashion sector are on the rise mostly due to the non-enforcement of labor laws and regulations in many nations. There is a lack of enforcement of laws and regulations in many countries, even though those that house the headquarters of fast fashion companies can enact regulations that deter outsourcing offshore or mandate that a company that outsources must have greater control over its supply chain. The perception that employers can abuse workers without fear of repercussions is fostered by this lack of enforcement, which provides the sense that labor laws are not important. In nations with underdeveloped administrations, investigative resources are inadequate for the efficient enforcement of labor laws.

Importation of goods produced in sweatshop conditions

Legislation to forbid the importation or sale of goods manufactured in factories under "sweatshop" circumstances has been proposed as a result of the serious problem of the importation of items produced in such conditions. But it's crucial to take into account any potential drawbacks of this kind of legislation, including low-wage workers in developing nations losing their employment. Ensuring that the legislation is implemented in a way that does not negatively impact low-income people is one strategy to address this issue. The legislation may also be supported by initiatives like funding for training and education programs that support economic growth and employment creation in developing nations.

Encouraging businesses to implement moral labor standards and advance supply chain transparency is another strategy. Choosing to purchase from businesses that value sustainability and moral labor standards is another way that consumers can contribute to the fight against fast fashion and sweatshops. In order to solve this

issue in a way that benefits employees and fosters sustainable economic growth, a holistic strategy that incorporates actions to promote economic development, encourage moral labor standards, and boost supply chain transparency can be extremely helpful.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Governments

Fast fashion companies can be headquartered in countries that have laws that discourage offshore outsourcing or mandate that organizations outsourcing must have more control over their supply chain. In addition, governments have the authority to enforce labor laws and guarantee adherence to global labor and human rights norms. For instance, the United States' No Tax Breaks for Outsourcing Act seeks to eliminate tax benefits that let businesses pay less tax on their offshore earnings, thereby discouraging outsourcing.

Consumers

By selecting brands that value sustainability and ethical labor standards, consumers can make a big difference in the fight against fast fashion and sweatshops. Fast fashion is a major cause of environmental deterioration; annually, the fashion sector emits more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than all international travel and maritime commerce put together. Customers may influence change in the industry and raise demand for sustainability and ethical labor standards by choosing to support sustainable fashion firms.

But one of the main reasons why people chose fast fashion over sustainable alternatives is price. There are a number of resources available to assist customers in locating ethical and sustainable fashion brands.

Worker-led initiatives

In the global apparel sector, worker-led initiatives have the potential to enhance working conditions and uphold worker rights, particularly in light of the increasing appeal of fast fashion. Workers have the ability to band together and advocate for the rights they deserve, including improved pay and working conditions. There have been many instances where multi-million dollar companies have been exposed for their exploitation due to the advocacy of the workers.

NGO's, worker-led initiatives, protests, and unions have seen an uproar after various third-degree exploitations and rights being evoked, for instance,

Development of Issue/Timeline

Date	Event	Outcome
1800s	Development in impulse shopping	Leading to corporations and businesses to create strategies to encourage such ideas.
1900s-1950s	Increase in manufacturing and making factories to help	Exploiting labour, using illegal labour, children in factories,

	support provide for increasing demand	locking labourers until assignments and working hours are not complete.
1960s-2000s	Companies becoming global, creating branches all around the world to seek for cheaper production costs and higher sales	corporations creating factories with lesser labour laws to and problems so that more work can be done faster.
2023	Addressing laws that have complete application at a global level to protect the rights of fast-fashion labour workers.	Better and fair treatment, introduction of fast-fashion labour unions, organizations and committees to protect their rights.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Private voluntary approaches

Private voluntary approaches have been used for more than two decades to address workers' rights abuses in supply chains, including the fast fashion industry. However, these approaches have not been entirely successful in improving the working conditions of laborers due to aspects such as, lack of binding and enforceable commitments, complex and globalized supply chains, power imbalances and lack of worker representation.

Worker empowerment

Worker empowerment was a crucial step taken by the suppressed and exploited labourers in the fast fashion industry, however, this attempt was not consistent and their powers were suppressed, due to lack of access to financial resources, promotion of women in leadership roles, inclusion of workers in decision-making processes, and not being able to address the root causes of the exploitation.

Regulations by headquarter countries

Countries that headquarter fast fashion companies can implement regulations that de-incentivize offshore outsourcing or require companies to be in greater control of their supply chain. This would force greater regulation of wages and hopefully prevent companies from abusing foreign labor because it is less expensive.

Possible Solutions

Transparency in the supply chain

Transparency in the supply chain is an essential step towards ensuring that proper treatments are being made in the fast fashion industry. Brands can increase transparency by presenting and identifying the names and locations of all of their suppliers. This would allow for greater accountability and monitoring of labor rights abuses. Brands like Adidas have fully disclosed their global factory lists and published detailed information, including the names and locations of suppliers by country since 2007. There are several ways to find out the names and locations of suppliers. Databases allow brands to search for specific suppliers by name and location, making it easier to identify the suppliers of their products.

Once brands have identified their suppliers, they can conduct surprise checks and maintain regular checks to ensure that proper treatments are being made. Brands can also collaborate with third-party organizations to conduct independent audits of their suppliers.

Consumer awareness

Consumers can play a significant role in supporting sustainable and ethical fashion practices by avoiding fast fashion brands and supporting brands that prioritize workers' rights and environmental sustainability. Conscious consumers buy from sustainable fashion companies that are committed to being as green as possible. People also choose to buy fewer clothes and look to shop secondhand and to buy from fashion companies that are committed to lessening their carbon footprint and paying their workers a living wage.

Consumer awareness is essential to make informed decisions regarding their clothing. Awareness involves not only having the information but also ensuring it is easily understood and accessible by all. Adopting an environmentally friendly laundry regime is an example of how better knowledge could change people's habits; washing full-loads, using the correct washing-cycle, switching to an energy-efficient washing machine, washing in cold water, drying clothes on a line, and using biodegradable detergents all add to sustainability.

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