

Demands on the Swiss Toy Sector

Reports regularly document the unacceptable working conditions in the toy industry. Human rights and fundamental labor rights are systematically disregarded, particularly in Chinese toy factories. These violations must end immediately, both from the view of consumers as well as from the perspectives of the social development of the producing countries. For that reason, a number of organizations – sometimes independent of each other – have reached out to companies and the public.

As a result, some companies were willing to start a dialog with the appropriate organizations, of which the following have formed a coalition for this purpose: the Berne Declaration (BD); the Swiss-French Federation of Consumers (Fédération romande des consommateurs, FRC); the Association for Swiss-Tibetan Friendship (Gesellschaft Schweizerisch-Tibetische Freundschaft, GSTF); the Basle working group of terre des hommes Switzerland; and the Foundation for Consumer Protection (SKS). Discussions took place in early 2006 with those companies seeking dialog: Migros, Franz Carl Weber, Lego, and the Swiss Toy Association (SVS).

Specific Problems in the Toy Industry

1. The behavior of the companies has been up to this point characterized by failure on three counts: no transparency (regarding producers, audit reports, and certification); no acceptance of responsibility (regarding national laws in the production countries and international norms); no participation (of affected persons and their NGO or labor union).
2. The specific situation in China must be taken into account, since 80 percent of global toy production takes place there. It is therefore essential to develop projects together with the constituent local organizations to reach the goal of freedom to organize according to the ILO via “parallel means” in China as well. At the factory level, new negotiating flexibility is appearing, which should lead to collective contracts.
3. The worldwide toy sector was until now unready for a dialog with civil society. This manifested itself by a passive strategy of risk management, public-relations offensives, and the questionable ICTI certification of factories. A multi-stakeholder initiative (MSI) would be desirable in the long-term. Within the textile industry, such MSIs (www.is-com.ch, www.fairwear.nl) already offer a systematic starting point and a clear perspective (with regard to the verification of code implementation). The toy sector must first recognize the minimum standards and begin with their implementation.
4. In 2001, the International Council of Toy Industries (ICTI) launched a business initiative. After four years, there are scant positive results to show; however we notice alarming negative consequences of this system. Instead of expensive ICTI audits, we call on business to exert its influence on the ICTI so that standards can be improved and questionable practices can be modified.

Demands on Swiss Companies

Swiss companies, regardless of their organizational structure and purchasing practices, share responsibility for the working conditions in toy factories. The Swiss toy coalition calls on the firms – and similarly the corresponding associations – to address this state of affairs with a pro-active strategy:

- Every company must recognize and implement social standards (according to laws and the ILO, for example the draft Jo-In code at www.jo-in.org) and environmental norms.
- These standards must be communicated to the staff in all production facilities. The staff should also receive the addresses of the labor inspectorate and a local NGO to enable the filing of complaints.
- Together with local organizations, every company should carry out training courses for the staff, employee organizations, and for middle and upper management (on labor rights, health and safety); every company should also carry out shop stewards committee elections.
- Every company that performs monitoring should inform the staff and local organizations about the audit reports and plans for improvement.
- Every company should make its list of distributors and producers public for local organizations.
- Every company should tell the Swiss toy coalition which of the firms, mentioned in specific reports¹, belong to its procurement chain.
- Every company that purchases Walt Disney books should address Disney directly, and thereby help to promote safer book production².
- Every company should adjust its purchasing practices so that fair prices are paid and reasonable delivery times are negotiated.
- Every company with a connection to ICTI should strive to improve the ICTI standard and to halt the ICTI certification program.
- Every company in contact with Chinese officials (in the context of the human rights discussions of the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA)) should demand the ratification of all fundamental ILO conventions (29, 87, 98, 105).

Appeal to the Swiss toy sector:

Every company should implement the demands listed above as soon as possible. The Toy Coalition created a questionnaire (see annexe). With this questionnaire, the actions implemented can be documented. **Please reply till end of September 2006** to the toy coalition (address: Swiss toy coalition, c/o GSTF, Binzstrasse 15, 8045 Zurich). We hope to receive substantive answers to all of our questions. Many thanks in advance!

On 31 October 2006, from 2-4pm, the Swiss Toy Coalition will meet with the SVS and interested sector representatives in Zurich, in order to review the situation.

Annexe:

«Questionnaire_Swiss_Toy_Coalition_Summer06.doc» => Download under: www.evb.ch/toys

¹ Reports were made on: Disney, Hasbro and Mattel, McDonald's, Yum Brands Inc. (KFC), Top Toy (BR-toys and Toys R' Us), Brio, Wal-mart, ICA und Åhléns (<http://www.evb.ch/p25010227.html>, in German).

² See Disney nomination from Public Eye Awards 2006: <http://www.evb.ch/en/p10426.html>