

Threads

Newsletter of the Clean Clothes Campaign

Clean
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Campaign

International Secretariat

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This Issue

**International
Forum Special**

Turkey

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Colophon

This newsletter is a **Clean Clothes Campaign** publication **ISSN print:** 1877-9905 **ISSN online:** 1878-0458 **Editors:** Marcella Kraay and Wyger Wentholt **Design:** Annelies Vlasblom **Printed:** on FCS certified paper by PrimaveraQuint

The Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) is dedicated to improving working conditions and supporting the empowerment of workers in the global garment and sportswear industries. Since 1989, the CCC has worked with trade unions, NGOs and workers across the globe to help ensure that the fundamental rights of workers are respected. We educate and mobilise consumers, lobby companies and governments, and offer direct solidarity support to workers as they fight for their rights and demand better working conditions.

Editorial

Four days in Turkey, over 90 workshops, more than 230 participants from 51 countries. For most of the participants, the recently-concluded CCC International Forum presented a broad range of activities: in-depth discussions as well as lighter entertainment, living-wage strategy discussions and belly-dancing courses, labour issue films and beer-tasting sessions, cold windy days and sunny beach walks, a hurried meal in the corridors and late-night gender discussions, task force side meetings and dancing to Bangladeshi hits – to name just a few of the highlights. Discussions went on from breakfast into the late hours, but there was also time for fun and laughter, getting to know one another, and learning each other's protest songs. It is impossible to summarize this four-day CCC International Forum in just a few pages. We are going to try nonetheless.

For some of us, this was our first experience attending an International Forum of this nature. Some of us finally got to meet the people face-to-face we had been working with for months or even years. It was exciting to meet one another in person and learn more about the people behind the email addresses. For others, the Forum offered a chance meet old friends again and engage in the kinds of discussions not easily engaged in via phone or Skype.

The Forum inspired a feeling that, despite our different situations, we are all united in the struggle for better working conditions in the garment sector, and that we have all experienced similar setbacks, challenges and victories.

This 'special' "IF Edition" is for those who did not have the chance to attend the Forum, offering them an impression

of the events, while, for those who did attend, this edition will hopefully serve as a souvenir or flash-back of sorts. It is impossible to capture in any significant detail the engaging discussions and the sharing of information and experiences that occurred during the Forum. For those seeking more details about the actual discussions, and for those who want to share their ideas, the IF website will remain on-line indefinitely. Partners who were unable to participate are encouraged to contact the CCC IS for more feedback and access to workshop reports. A video report of the gathering will be available soon as well. ✂



Captivated or confused...

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Closing the Ranks in Times of Crisis

Hot Topics and Major Outcomes of the International Forum



The current economic situation created a grim backdrop for the CCC International Forum that took place in Turkey, November 22-26, 2010. Discussions thus focused on how the broader CCC – including partners in garment-producing countries and allies in North America – currently views itself, which issues the CCC would like to develop in the coming years, and what the CCC's priorities should be.

One of the many significant outcomes of the Forum was the progress made by participants focusing on **migrant workers** in the garment industry. The CCC is committed to focusing on the problems faced by migrant workers in the host countries where they work. Migrant workers often find themselves in vulnerable positions when it comes to their rights and they are easily exploited. A migrants working group was formed, which made significant progress on decisions involving strategy, cooperation and the sharing of information within the CCC network.

Current CCC plans call for further engagement with garment workers in the **informal sector**, not only because they constitute a majority of the garment industry workforce, but also in response to the worrying trend of increasing 'casualisation', with fewer employees receiving long-term contracts and more of them being forced into short-term employment, day labour or no formal employment at all.

Gender issues were also high on the IF agenda. The common challenges that women in the garment industry continue to face provided for lively discussions between representatives of the various countries and regions. One of the obstacles that was discussed was a reported lack of solidarity that exists between working women themselves, especially when they represent different levels within the union, organisation or company, or between working mothers and working women without children. The solutions can maybe be found in increasing awareness of the potential for collective action among women workers. A new synergy was further created on the issue of women trade union leadership positions, while plans to facilitate greater exchanges between women organisers within the network were also made.

In addition, trade unions were urged to **increase the organisational capacities** of both women in the informal sector and

the migrant workers. These discussions, in turn, led to the exchange of experiences among the participants. For example, organisations representing home-based workers in Turkey and a Southeast Asian network that supports abused domestic employees shared their strategies for reaching out to unorganized and difficult-to-reach groups.

Occupational health and safety issues were hot topics as well. There has been much progress made on issue of the sandblasting of jeans, for instance. The Turkish Solidarity Committee of Sandblasting Labourers presented their observations, detailing the problem of the under-reporting of former sandblasters dying from silicosis in many countries. Participants from China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Mexico, and Argentina returned home with plans to investigate and launch campaigns to increase awareness of this issue. The participants were able to find supportive contacts in this regard.

Many participants noted that the **workshops and discussions on skills**, such as bargaining techniques, campaigning tactics, and the Internet and new media were very beneficial.

The workers and worker-organisers present at the Forum reinforced the CCC's practice of **working closely with those on the factory work floor**, and to ensure that our campaigning is guided by the needs of the garments workers themselves. Moreover, this forum offered these garment workers an opportunity to learn more about how their factories operate in the larger global context.

Another group focused on **future developments for the CCC and its network of partners**. A two-year plan was launched to investigate the structure of the movement, decision-making processes, how the membership should be organised, etc. No conclusions were reached, because the intention was to actually initiate the process and brainstorm rather than reach any conclusions at this stage. The variety of perspectives and ideas indeed reflected the diversity of representatives within the network.

Reinforcing solidarity within the movement was also a major focus of the Forum. Numerous ideas were discussed on how to strengthen the network in the context of the current global economic crisis, and the resulting repression of trade unions and the closing of factories in garment-producing countries. Various participants discussed the best strategies for organising workers under the current economic conditions. Meanwhile, in an increasingly adverse political climate, consumer countries, organisations and trade unions are experiencing cuts in funding from government sources for solidarity work. These circumstances call for unified responses, and a closing of the ranks during a period of bigger successes and increasing challenges. >8



Impressions from the Forum



“Sharing the same dream of changing the situation and improving working conditions, the feeling of fighting together - that was great.”

Sari Idayani, worker for Panarub Industry, Indonesia



“The IF to me meant a great chance to concretise common projects in the garment sector.”

Boubker Khamilichi, Association Atawassoul and FNSEA, Morocco



“I was impressed by the atmosphere of international solidarity, it felt very encouraging.”

Cheng Yiyi, project officer SACOM, Hong Kong



“The most significant thing for me was that trade union people could build strategies together with grassroots organisers and campaigners.”

Ashim Roy, General Secretary New Trade Union Initiative, India



“For me it was great to hear from a Polish worker and unionist that she realised how to incorporate gender mainstreaming into her work.”

Joanna Szabuńsko, KARAT Coalition, NGOs and CCC Poland.



“Thanks to the input we got at the IF, we are now able to move forward with our struggle more confidently.”

Jittinan Sukno,
president of Triumph Union TITLU, Thailand



“A Cambodian woman told me about her struggles in life, and a worker from Turkey risked being fired for taking a whole week off. I was really inspired by these workers’ stories.”

Bilge Seckin, activist
and International Forum
organiser



“Without the IF, I would have never come to Turkey. All my dreams came true and we came together.”

Sonia Pernillo, organiser
and ex-maquila woker,
Guatemala



“You could create your own workshop, and have a personal agenda for the whole Forum – this was really impressive.”

Maria Dovidio, NGO activist in Interrupcion Asociacion Civil, Argentina



“The most special aspect at the IF was the solidarity spirit, the joint fist raising and slogan shouting like makibaka huwag matakot! ”

Kurbana Yastika,
illegally dismissed
garment worker, Indonesia



“Without the IF we wouldn’t have heard about the solidarity committee on silicosis, it was the contact point to start exchange programmes between China and Turkey.”

Han Dong Fang, China
Labour Bulletin, based in
Hong Kong





Looking Ahead

Women's Day: Tribunal on Wage and Working Conditions in Sri Lanka

The Asia Floor Wage committee in Sri Lanka and the Committee for Asian Women will organise a "Tribunal" on Wage and Working Conditions from March 6-8. Garment workers - most of whom are women - and other industry experts will testify for the tribunal and focus on the link between gender and living wage.

This publicity event will be the first in a series of national tribunals leading up to an international tribunal around the urgent need for a living wage in the garment industry.