

IN SOLIDARITY WITH GARMENT WORKERS WORLDWIDE



**THE CLEAN CLOTHES
URGENT APPEALS
SYSTEM**



THE CLEAN CLOTHES CAMPAIGN (CCC) IS A GLOBAL COALITION OF NGOS AND TRADE UNIONS THAT WORK TOGETHER TO PUSH FOR BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE GARMENT INDUSTRY AND FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF GARMENT WORKERS. IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS WORK, THE CCC IS COMMITTED TO CARRYING OUT DIRECT SOLIDARITY ACTION TO SUPPORT GARMENT WORKERS IN THEIR STRUGGLE TO SEE THAT THEIR RIGHTS ARE RESPECTED.



WHAT ARE CCC URGENT APPEALS?

Developing and circulating appeals for urgent action (called “urgent appeals” for short) is one way that the CCC supports garment workers in specific cases where their rights have been violated. A **CCC urgent appeal** contains a request from workers or their organizations that people take action (ex. write a letter of protest to a factory owner) to demonstrate support for workers’ demands in a situation where their rights are not being respected. The CCC frequently receives appeals from workers producing garments and sports shoes for companies that are part of the international supply chains of major multinational brand name companies. These

brand name companies are vulnerable to public opinion regarding conditions at their suppliers, therefore concern expressed by activists and the public can have an impact on the action such companies take in relation to these cases. In recent years the campaign has taken up an average of 30 cases per year in nearly as many countries.

DECIDING TO TAKE URGENT ACTION

The CCC only takes action on cases of rights violations if it is clear that this is what the workers involved in the dispute want.

The CCC believes that **garment workers** should be the ones to **decide** if they want international support in specific cases where their rights have been violated. For workers, drawing public attention to rights violations at the international level often involves taking significant **risk**. They might suffer discrimination for speaking out about the conditions in their workplace – they might be reassigned to other jobs, they might be suspended, or they might lose their jobs and be blacklisted from future employment. Workers must understand and consider these risks when deciding if they want to draw international attention to their dispute and what form that international support should take (a public campaign is just one option, in many cases workers do not want their complaints/negotiations to be made public but would still like support from international labor rights activists).^{*} Workers and their representatives know the **local context** of their cases best and therefore play a key role in determining if international action should be taken and in developing the international action strategies in these cases.

The CCC has limited resources and unfortunately is not able to follow-up on all the requests for action that are received. Decisions to take up cases are made by the **CCC International Secretariat** in conjunction with the urgent appeal coordinators at the various **national-level CCCs** (each CCC is a coalition of NGOs and trade unions, and each has a designated urgent appeal coordinator). These decisions are generally based on **capacity** available at that moment to undertake effective action. In prioritizing cases, national-level CCCs usually prefer to get involved in cases that have a connection to their coalition or market (ex. the German campaign is more likely to work on a case that involves a company that has its headquarters in Germany, or if based elsewhere sells its products in Germany). If the CCC is unable to take up a case, the campaign will, if possible, refer requests for assistance to other organizations that might be able to provide such support.



UK CCC demonstration in support of Thai garment workers, 1996

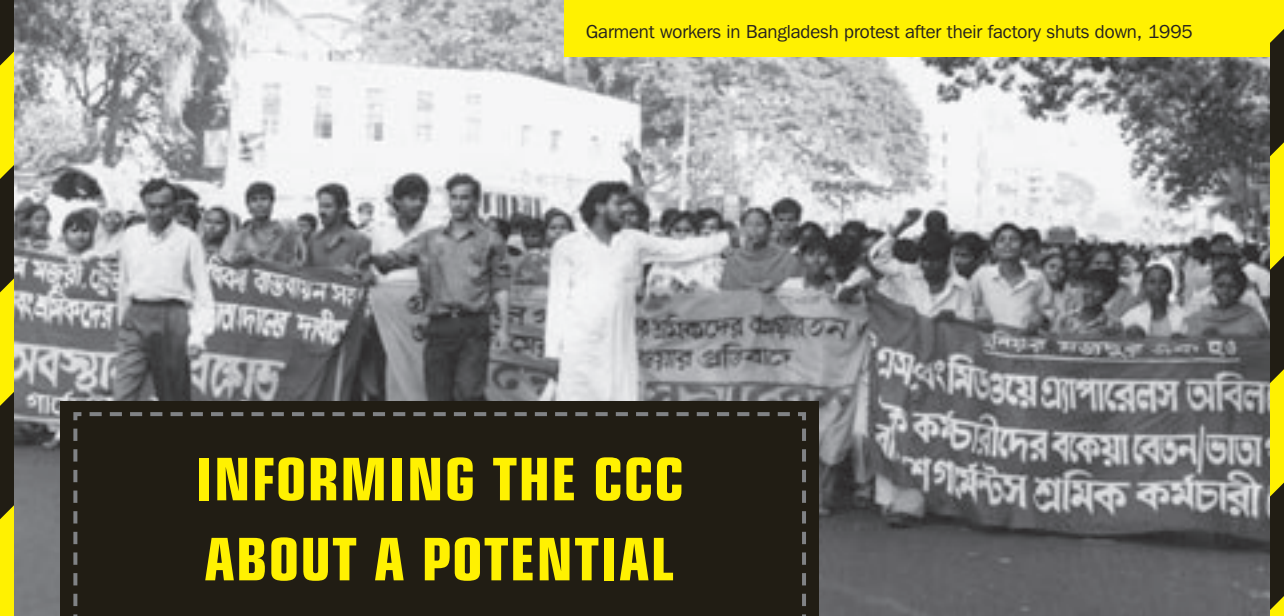
^{*} The CCC is not a funding agency and is unable to provide financial support to other organizations.

HOW THE CCC WORKS ON URGENT APPEALS

The CCC receives requests for action through its International Secretariat or the individual national-level CCCs (for a list of contacts please see the CCC website www.cleanclothes.org/contacting.htm). CCC staff at the International Secretariat or the individual CCCs verify and clarify these requests, adding to the initial case information using the CCC's network of local contacts in the country where the rights violation has occurred. Each national-level CCC has a contact person who handles CCC urgent appeals work in their national coalition, though depending on the circumstances of a particular case (ex. geographical location, nature of the rights violation) different organizations within the CCC coalitions might be involved in carrying out case-related activities (ex. depending on their specific expertise or focus). If more than one CCC works on a case, a case coordinator is selected to serve as the

focal point for the campaign's overall work on a case. Questions about which CCCs are working on a specific case can be directed to the International Secretariat.

URGENT APPEALS ACTIVITIES include writing letters of protest to companies or public authorities, launching large-scale public e-mail and fax campaigns to pressure companies or governments to take positive action, writing letters of solidarity to workers and their organizations, and carrying out a variety of awareness-raising events (speaker tours, press conferences, demonstrations) to draw attention to cases of rights violations, both among the general public and the media.



EXAMPLES OF URGENT APPEALS CASES

Most of the cases in which the CCC takes action are related to violations of core labor standards on **freedom of association** and **the right to organize and collectively bargain** (International Labor Organization conventions 87 and 98). In the past, the CCC has been contacted about and taken action on violations of these standards in **Asia, North and Central America, Africa, and Europe**. Violations include denying workers the right to form a trade union and bargain collectively; discrimination, harassment, and violence against union members or sympathizers; and dismissal of workers due to union activities. **Gender discrimination** and other bad labor practices (such as unpaid wages or wages below the legal minimum, denial of legal benefits, unsafe conditions, and forced or improperly compensated overtime) are also violations that come up in cases that the CCC takes up.

Examples of cases the CCC has worked on publicly in recent years include the **Matamoros Garment** case, in which a Mexican factory producing for a major European sportswear brand denied workers their right to freedom of association; the **Gina Form Bra Company** case in Thailand, where union leaders were unjustly fired after trying to negotiate for better working conditions at a factory producing for various

North American brands and retailers'; the case of **Jaqalanka Ltd.**, a factory in Sri Lanka where workers producing garments for major U.S. brands faced a tough anti-union campaign; and a request to support garment workers working for many foreign companies in **Kenya's export processing zones**, on strike and demanding a range of improvements to working conditions. There are also numerous cases that never make it to the public; instead at the request of the workers or their organizations the CCC works behind the scenes to help create a space so that workers' concerns are heard by local management, public authorities, brand-name garment companies and retailers, and others who have a responsibility to ensure compliance with good labor standards throughout international garment industry supply chains.

The cases taken up in CCC urgent appeals are often complex and they do not always end successfully. However there have been some successes: The struggle at Gina Form for example lasted six months and resulted in the reinstatement of the workers and the signing of a collective bargaining agreement, and at Jaqalanka the workers succeeded in their attempt to gain recognition for their union. Even in instances where workers demands, however justified, are not met, international solidarity action can make a contribution to the empowerment of workers and their organizing efforts.

To read more about urgent appeals cases that the CCC is currently working on, please see the CCC website www.cleanclothes.org/appeals.htm. If you would like to receive CCC urgent appeals by e-mail, please sign up at the CCC website www.cleanclothes.org/action

INFORMING THE CCC ABOUT A POTENTIAL URGENT APPEALS CASE

If your organization would like to explore the possibility of international support in relation to specific cases of labor rights violations, contact the CCC International Secretariat with the following information:

- ★ Description of the labor rights violation that has occurred (including dates that they occurred and any local labor laws that have been violated)
- ★ Name, address, and contact information (fax, phone, e-mail) of the factory/workplace involved
- ★ Name and contact information of the owner of the workplace
- ★ Summary of the workers' demands
- ★ Name and contact information for the organizations seeking assistance and their relationship to the workers involved (again, the CCC will only take up cases in which it is clear that workers want such action to be taken)

- ★ Name and contact information for any union involved, including the union affiliations
- ★ Name and contact information for any other organizations actively supporting the workers
- ★ Name of companies (brands) that the factory produces for
- ★ Country where goods are exported to

The CCC will gather information on the brand name companies involved in the case and any codes of conduct that they might have (in some cases workers and their organizations find that the company codes can provide them with leverage in their negotiations). The CCC communicates this information back to the organization seeking assistance and requests any further clarification. Then decisions are made on how to follow-up. Functioning channels of communication between the CCC and any organization requesting assistance are a prerequisite for the CCC to take up a case.

HOW TO CONTACT THE CCC URGENT APPEALS SYSTEM

PLEASE CONTACT THE CCC INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT:

International Secretariat
Clean Clothes Campaign
Postbus 1584
1001 GN Amsterdam
The Netherlands
T: +31 20 412 27 85
F: +31 20 412 27 86
E: info@cleanclothes.org

For more information about other Clean Clothes
Campaign activities, please see the CCC website:
www.cleanclothes.org

