



WORKER RIGHTS CONSORTIUM

Arturo D. Brion, Secretary
Department of Labor and Employment
Intramuros, Manila
Republic of the Philippines
Via electronic mail: osec@dole.gov.ph

September 11, 2007

Dear Mr. Brion:

Thank you for your reply, dated June 9, 2007, to the letter that the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) submitted to you from a number of American retailers of university logo clothing. We appreciate your explaining the steps that the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) has taken to protect the rights of workers and labor rights advocates, as well as the supplementary information you supplied regarding labor relations in the Philippines.

Unfortunately, in light of subsequent reports of violent attacks on striking workers in the Cavite Export Processing Zone (CEPZ), our organization remains deeply concerned for the safety of these and other workers in the Philippines engaged in the exercise of their associational rights.

As you may know, the WRC is a labor rights monitoring organization representing 175 universities in the United States. These universities hold business contracts with many companies to produce and sell apparel and other products bearing the universities' names and logos. These products are manufactured in many countries around the world, including the Philippines. It is the WRC's function to ensure that the rights of workers engaged in the manufacture of these products are respected. When reports arise suggesting that worker rights have been violated, we are obligated to investigate the situation and report on our findings to our universities and the affected clothing brands. It is from this perspective that we write to express concern about recent reports of severe labor rights violations and request information on the Philippine government's response.

The first of the two recent incidents in the CEPZ occurred on the night of June 10-11. According to credible reports, strikers on the Chong Won (now known as C. Woo) picket line were twice assaulted by armed men who destroyed the picket line and the workers' personal belongings, and threatened to kill the workers if they did not abandon the strike. The incident is detailed in the attached [letter](#) to President Macapagal-Arroyo from a number of American clothing brands, dated August 3. Of particular concern are the reports that the attackers were dressed in partial military uniforms, and that the workers were denied assistance by both the PEZA police and the National Municipal Police of Rosario following the attacks.

The second violent incident occurred on August 6 around midnight, when female workers on the picket line at Phils Jeon Garments were reportedly attacked by approximately ten masked men who again wore partial military uniforms. According to the strikers, these men tied and blindfolded the workers and forced them into a truck. The men dismantled the picket line and placed all of the workers' belongings into the truck. The truck then drove outside the gates of the CEPZ before releasing the workers. This attack occurred just days after the attached letter of concern was sent to President Macapagal-Arroyo.

While you indicate in your June 9 letter that the DOLE is confident that the PEZA is undertaking sufficient measures to protect the interests of workers and other stakeholders, these recent events indicate that any measures that have been taken have been wholly inadequate. Indeed many of the circumstances surrounding the recent attacks, including the presence of armed attackers within the secured CEPZ and the failure of the PEZA police to assist the workers in investigating the assaults, suggest that the PEZA failed to take even the most basic steps to protect the rights of these striking workers. Your letter mentions that investigations were made regarding the role of the export processing zone authorities in the violence against Chong Won and Phils Jeon strikers. In light of these recent attacks, it would be helpful for the DOLE to report on the results of these investigations and the specific remedial measures that have been taken in response. We also hope that investigations will be conducted into the most recent attacks, looking specifically at the role played by the PEZA as well as the alleged involvement of the Philippine military. It is critical that the DOLE work not only with PEZA, but with the other government entities that have allegedly been involved with attacks on workers, including local police and the military, to ensure that they understand their obligations to respect and protect the rights of workers.

Finally, your letter confirms that Chong Won has temporarily closed without filing the proper notice with the DOLE. Could you please explain what action the DOLE is taking in this regard? Specifically, what is your department doing to ensure that workers are not inappropriately terminated and that if they are terminated that they receive the severance benefits to which they are entitled by law?

As we know you are aware, there is growing concern throughout the international community about human rights and labor rights violations in the Philippines. It is imperative that the government of the Philippines bring an end to violence against trade unionists and other worker advocates. Global brands do not want to be associated with human rights violations. The Philippines will not be able to attract investment to its export processing zones if the country does not protect basic human and worker rights.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'SN' or 'Nova', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Scott Nova

Cc: HE Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, President, Republic of the Philippines
Atty. Lilia B. De Lima, Director-General, Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA)