

Minutes of the WRC Board Meeting April 21, 2023

The meeting was held at Georgetown University and on Zoom.

Present at the meeting in person were Kyle Muncy, Cal Watson, and Craig Westemeier of the University Caucus; Julie Farb, Mark Levinson, Julie Martinez Ortega, and Angeles Solis of the Advisory Council; Shreya Basu and Kelsey Coleman of USAS.

Board Members attending via Zoom were Jill Esbenshade of the Advisory Council, Rachel Duffy of the University Caucus, and Carmen Metoyer, Maddy Rogers, and Nikki Snyder of USAS.

WRC staff members in attendance in person were Scott Nova, Jessica Champagne, Rola Abimourched, and Kimberly Capehart. Ben Hensler and Thulsi Narayanasamy attended via Zoom.

Observer in attendance in person was Makayla Heiser of USAS.

Mark Pearce of the Advisory Council; Mike Ferrari and Alixe Holcomb of the University Caucus were absent.

The meeting was called to order at 9:15 a.m. by the Board Chair, Shreya.

Approval of Agenda and Minutes from the October Board Meeting

Julie M.O. moved to approve the agenda. Kyle seconded. All board members voted in favor.

Kyle moved to approve the January Board Meeting minutes. Mark L. seconded. All board members voted in favor.

Executive Director's Report

Personnel Updates – Jess Champagne

Jess reviewed the current vacancies at the WRC, including the Communications and Research Associate, and two field consultancies: Field Representative in Pakistan, and Southeast Asia Case Coordinator, noting also a new temporary consultant position in Turkey. She introduced the WRC's newest permanent consultant, our Field Representative in India. Jess also provided a review of all current staff positions.

Mark L. inquired about the connectedness of international staff. Jess replied with a number of ways that the team connects, including on Zoom and a return to more in person meetings.

A Review of the WRC's 2022–2023 Investigations – Jess Champagne

Jess highlighted the breadth of investigations and remediation work the WRC has conducted since the start of the fiscal year.

Trax Apparel – Rola Abimourched

Rola provided an update on the investigation and remediation effort at Trax Apparel, a Cambodian collegiate supplier to adidas. She reported the successful resolution of the case, with the factory reinstating, and providing full back pay, to the workers it had unlawfully refused to rehire for nearly three years. She reviewed the hardships workers endured and what it means to them and their families to receive their back pay.

Hong Seng – Scott Nova

Scott discussed the wage theft case at Hong Seng Knitting, a collegiate supplier to Nike, located in Thailand. He provided a recap of the case and of Nike's unwillingness to acknowledge the violations. He updated the Board on the WRC's engagement with Nike, and the latter's continued refusal to remediate, beyond a handful of workers who won cases at the Thai labor ministry. Scott expressed his concern that the most prominent licensee in the collegiate sphere is acting with such disregard for its labor rights obligations.

Turkey – Scott Nova

Scott reported on major labor rights concerns surrounding garment and textile workers in Turkey that were affected by the earthquake on February 6, 2023. The WRC has launched a project to press buyers that source from the region to treat suppliers fairly in the wake of the earthquake, by not penalizing them for late deliveries, for example. The WRC is currently seeking a consultant to engage with brands.

Mark L. inquired about the funding. Scott reported that we have an existing grant that was increased by the funder to support the work in Turkey.

Angeles highlighted some NGOs in Turkey that she can connect with the WRC.

Pakistan Accord on Health and Safety in the Textile and Garment Industry

Scott provided an overview of the history and implementation of the Bangladesh Accord, noting the unprecedented progress in building safety in the garment industry that covers millions of workers and has saved countless lives. He reviewed the university licensees that are signatories to the International Accord, formerly the Bangladesh Accord.

He discussed the creation of the International Accord on Safety and Health in the Textile and Garment Industry into Pakistan and progress toward its implementation. He also noted a recent fire in Pakistan that led to the deaths of four firefighters due to a structural collapse during the fire, underscoring the urgency of implementation.

Angeles asked for clarification on adidas. Adidas has not signed the Pakistan Accord yet. Scott noted they do not make collegiate apparel there, though they are a major buyer from the country.

Kyle discussed a proposed resolution for the Board to consider on the Pakistan Accord. The resolution notes the vital importance of the Pakistan Accord as the best means to protect workers making collegiate apparel; encourages universities to require licensees sourcing collegiate goods from Pakistan to sign (including non-WRC affiliates); and directs the Executive Director to ask the licensing agencies to communicate jointly with the WRC, to universities, encouraging the

adoption of this requirement. Kyle noted that the Collegiate Licensing Company (CLC) has indicated openness to a joint communication strategy. Scott credited CLC for its strong support for the Pakistan Accord.

Mark L. inquired about the stance of the US Government. Scott replied that they have been helpful in certain ways, specifically with the Pakistan government, however, they could do more.

Several board members proposed edits to the language of the resolution. A consensus was reached.

Kyle moved to approve the motion as amended. Mark L. seconded. All board members voted in favor.

Resolution for the Pakistan Accord on Health & Safety in the Textile & Garment Industry

The WRC Board recognizes the vital importance of building safety in the supply chain of university licensees and recognizes that participation in the Pakistan Accord is the surest way for licensees to protect the safety of workers in Pakistan. The WRC Board therefore wishes to encourage all universities and colleges, including those that are not WRC affiliates, to add language to their licensing agreements requiring Pakistan Accord participation for licensees that are sourcing collegiate products from Pakistan.

The WRC Board instructs the Executive Director to request of the agencies that represent universities and colleges in product licensing that they issue communications jointly with the WRC conveying this recommendation to their university and college clients and to work with the agencies to issue such communications on behalf of the WRC Board. The WRC instructs the Executive Director to communicate separately on behalf of the Board with affiliates that are not clients of one of the licensing agencies or in the case that affiliates are represented by a licensing agency that does not agree to this request.

Gender-Based Violence and Harassment – Thulsi Narayanasamy and Jessica Champagne

Thulsi provided an overview of the prevalence of gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) in garment factories across the globe. Thulsi reviewed some of the precipitating factors of GBVH in factories including: a workforce predominately of women with managers and supervisors usually being men; pressure from factories to meet production quotas; poverty wages; and power dynamics in securing permanent employment. She noted the importance of university codes, as well as brand codes and ILO Convention 190, in providing leverage for remediation. Thulsi reviewed a number of challenges to uncovering GBVH: fear of retaliation, shame, and a lack of knowledge of and focus on gender issues by complainants. She noted that the WRC field staff have observed an increased focus and awareness in GBVH issues in recent years.

Jess highlighted the importance of ILO Convention 190, both in its generation with input from worker groups globally, as well as the implementation of the Convention in pressing for remediation.

Jess reviewed several recent cases that had a unique focus on GBVH. She recapped the Nien Hsing investigation in Lesotho, where there was widespread GBVH and a culture of impunity. She noted a recently issued report on the implementation of the enforceable brand agreements to combat GBVH at Nien Hsing. She flagged a number of datapoints from that report highlighting the transformative impact of these agreements.

Jess reviewed another case in Guatemala at a factory called Centexsa. She noted that a supervisor sexually assaulted two women in a factory, while human resources did not act to protect the workers. After the WRC intervened, Jess reviewed the remediation that was achieved, including the supervisor being fired and blacklisted from all parent company factories.

Jess reviewed an investigation at a factory in Indonesia, on which the WRC has not yet reported. She noted the precarious position of women who must rely on mechanics to fix their sewing machines. Some mechanics use this power to sexually harass and coerce the women workers. Women workers also reported that a senior manager sexually assaulted women in the factory. The WRC is engaged in extensive work on remediation at this facility, in close consultation with the union representing workers. She reported that substantial progress is being achieved.

Cal inquired about the funding for the Workers' Rights Watch in Lesotho. Rola responded that brands provided funding for the program for the first two years of the program. She added that it is currently being funded through grants. Mark L. inquired about the union presence. Rola described the central role of the three unions representing workers at the Nien Hsing factories in the implementation of the program.

Set the Next Board Meeting Date

The Board agreed to meet on Friday, September 29, 2023.

Executive Session

An executive session was held to discuss confidential financial, administrative, and programmatic matters.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:03 p.m.