

Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of the Worker Rights Consortium on April 24, 2025

The meeting was held at Georgetown University and on Zoom.

Present at the meeting in person were Angeles Solis of the Advisory Council; Michael Ferrari, Sam Harasen, Alixe Holcomb, Kyle Muncy, Cal Watson, and Craig Westemeier of the University Caucus.

Board Members attending via Zoom were Jill Esbenshade, Mark Levinson, Julie Martínez Ortega of the Advisory Council and Christian Heller of USAS.

WRC staff members in attendance in person were Scott Nova, Ben Hensler, Jessica Champagne, Rola Abimourched, Sarah Reed, Rosie Urbanovich, Ariana MacMartin, and Kimberly Capehart.

Observers in attendance on Zoom were Shreya Basu of USAS.

Julie Farb and Mark Pearce of the Advisory Council; Caro Bewley, Aidan Moore, and Grayson Ren of USAS were absent.

The meeting was called to order at 9:14 a.m. by the Board Chair, Mike.

Approval of Agenda

Kyle moved to approve the agenda. Craig seconded. All board members voted in favor.

Executive Director's Report

New Staff – Scott Nova

Scott welcomed Rosie Urbanovich to the staff.

Review of Recent Cases – Rola Abimourched and Ben Hensler

Rola provided an overview of successfully resolved cases at more than 30 factories and the WRC's engagement with 28 collegiate licensees who sourced from these factories. She showed the board a video describing the successful remediation at Base Textiles, including hundreds of thousands of dollars in back pay for workers. Rola highlighted one investigation, Grupo Merlet, where a union leader faced illegal termination. Despite a court order mandating the worker's reinstatement, the factory refused to comply. Rola reported that only after intervention by the WRC did the worker receive an offer of reinstatement along with back pay.

Ben discussed the numerous improvements secured by the WRC at Northstar Manufacturing, a factory in Thailand supplying Peter Millar, Mizuno, and Jako. Ben reported that workers were paid only half the minimum wage and were locked in hidden onsite dormitories, only being allowed out a few hours a month to purchase groceries. The factory confiscated their passports and instructed workers to mislead onsite auditors about their wages. After extensive engagement

with the buyers, Ben outlined the factories implementation of the remedial measures directed by the WRC, including providing back pay and raising wages to the legal minimum. While remediation efforts were in progress, new violations surfaced, including the practice of forcing pregnant workers to resign to evade maternity leave costs. The WRC identified proper remedies and the factory agreed to implement them. Ben reported that the sum total of the changes over a period of years has transformed one of the worst factories in the region to one of the best.

Rola also updated the Board on Aseel Universal, a factory in Jordan, staffed by migrant workers from India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, that shut down suddenly after failing to pay workers for up to nine months. Despite intense pressure from the government to leave the country without their wages, these migrant workers remained to demand the \$2.8 million in compensation they were legally owed. The WRC identified Calvin Klein product in the factory. The brand is owned by PVH and the work was being done on behalf of a PVH licensee, G-III. As it was obvious that the factory owner, who had absconded from the country, could not be compelled to pay, the WRC pressed PVH and G-III agreed to ensure remediation, as their own codes of conduct promise. After extensive discussions, these companies agreed to pay the workers in full, covering back wages, unused vacation, and three months' compensation for the unlawful manner of the closure, per Jordanian law.

The government of Jordan and the employers' association also committed that it would not blacklist these workers, many of whom hoped, despite their experience at Aseel, to return to Jordan to work in the future. However, reports indicate that some workers are indeed facing blacklisting. Following further engagement, a few workers have successfully secured new positions, and the WRC is pressing for broader remedy.

Central Java Gender Justice Program – Jessica Champagne

Jess briefly reviewed investigations at PT Semarang and PT Batang, collegiate suppliers in Indonesia with a common owner, which documented widespread and long-standing gender based violence and harassment. Jess reviewed the groundbreaking agreement to remediate the GBVH that the WRC announced to the university community in February. She played a video that reviewed the workers' experience participating in the committee that inside the factory that exists to address incidents of GBVH. She also informed the board about a trip that she and Rola took to join Bent and our local staff representatives at the factory to observe the impacts of the program: talking with the members of the anti-GBVH committee, hearing worker stories, and monitoring implementation first hand.

Discussion of Proposed Change in Selection of Student Board Members

Mike provided a brief update on the discussion the WRC affiliates had at the University Caucus, which occurred two days ago on April 22. He noted that Mark Anner presented background and context on the history of the anti-sweatshop student movement and on USAS and SILS specifically. He reported that the UC discussed the proposed bylaw amendment as a constituency.

Christian provided a brief history of USAS and SILS, noting a shift in USAS to focusing on domestic worker solidarity, and the emergence of SILS as a result.

The Board had an extensive discussion on this issue with a number of questions and considerations shared. Ben affirmed that, under the bylaws, each constituency has the authority to nominate its own members to the WRC board. The Board concluded that, in the absence of a consensus to amend the bylaws, no amendment will occur at this meeting.

Meeting This Moment: Discussing the Impact of Changes in Federal Policy and Practice on Our Work

Sarah facilitated a discussion on the challenges faced by nonprofits amid recent changes in funding, government regulations, and executive orders. Board members expressed concerns about t cuts to international funding for partner organizations. Board members raised the issue of the enforcement of forced labor laws and civil society engagement in that enforcement.

Approval of Minutes from the March Board Meeting

Kyle moved to approve the minutes. Craig seconded. All board members voted in favor.

Executive Session

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