

# The Cornell Daily Sun

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## C.U. Backs Anti-Sweatshop Activism

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After almost eight months of extensive meetings, discussions and student-led activism, Day Hall released a statement in support of the Designated Suppliers Program advocated by the Cornell chapter of the United Students Against Sweatshops yesterday afternoon.

The Designated Suppliers Program requires, among other things, that the factories producing University logo clothing pay workers a living wage, allow workers to freely express their rights, allow workers to be represented by a union and outlaw sweatshop conditions that exist. USAS is a nonprofit organization affiliated with the international Workers' Rights Consortium.

On Sept. 28, a formal list of demands drafted by members of CSAS was handed over to Day Hall asking the University to support the DSP campaign. Strategically, the initiative attempts to get rid of sweatshop labor by asking colleges to award contracts to apparel factories that meet the WRC standards and punish factories that are deemed to have sweatshop conditions by withdrawing contracts.

The declaration of support by the University comes after many months of organizing and activism by members of USAS. According to Jordan Wells '07, students gathered over five hundred signatures this past semester asking interim President Hunter R. Rawlings III to support the DSP, have conducted teach-ins and brought multiple speakers to campus including foreign textile workers.

Cornell has been a member of the WRC since 2000, and along with the other 150 member universities have received information regarding factories that have sweatshop conditions and corporations that contract with these factories. Cornell is now one of less than a dozen schools that have publicly come out in support of the DSP, although, according to Simeon Moss '73, Cornell press office director, there are other schools including the University of Wisconsin and the University of Indiana, that are preparing a public show of support for the initiative.

USAS members Wells and Glynis Ritchie '06 traveled to the Dominican Republic over spring break to meet with textile workers at the BJ&B factory, one of the factories listed as a designated supplier. Workers at the BJ&B factory unionized over a year ago, but since then have lost apparel contracts because other factories with sweatshop conditions have successfully outbid them. There were over 3,500 people working in the BJ&B factories before January 2005, and now there are only about 500.

According to Wells, the workers told him that "[they] need increased support from students and increased business because the brands don't order from us anymore ♦ first we thought we were doing the right thing by earning justice [joining a union] at work but the brands pulled out the orders, and so there is very little work."

Workers met with Wells and Ritchie at their union hall and held posters addressing Rawlings as

well as a petition signed by over 30 workers asking the interim president, in Spanish, to support the DSP.

In response to the concern of some members of USAS that Cornell has been stalling in its support of the DSP, Moss stressed that the demands presented to the administration this past September are quite complex and said, "the DSP has generated several legal, economic and logistical questions that had to be discussed by Cornell. There are a lot of issues involved, and we've been active participants in on-site meetings, teleconferences and meetings with industry representatives." Furthermore, Moss explained that the administration had to meet with "economists, labor lawyers and anti-trust specialists" while formulating University policy.

"The important thing to remember is not why it's taken so long to [get this statement out] but the due diligence [Cornell] went through in releasing this recommendation," he added.

Although Wells is happy that Cornell has publicly announced its support for the DSP, he stressed "the only cause for celebration is when Cornell begins placing orders that will go to the designated supplier factories." He added that Cornell will now "encounter some resistance from the brands and must be prepared to confront some of the opposition." Ritchie agreed with Well's assessment and said, "the fact that [Cornell] signed on doesn't inherently mean that this is a success, we need to ensure that there is implementation of this program as soon as possible."

The announcement yesterday follows a recommendation released by a committee of faculty members, administrators and students organized to help formulate University policy with regard to the DSP. Although no changes have yet to be made in Cornell's purchasing arrangements, Moss said that "[Cornell] is continuing to work on a plan that we think is going to be the most effective."

A meeting to help organize the logistics of the DSP is scheduled for April 21 in Washington, D.C. Every school that has signed on to the DSP will send both administration and student representatives.

<http://www.cornellsun.com/media/storage/paper866/news/2006/04/05/News/C.u-Backs.AntiSweatshop.Activism-1783489.shtml?norewrite200604071256&sourcedomain=www.cornellsun.com>