

# Levi Strauss, Kontoor Back Worker-Protection Accord in Lesotho

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- Plan to combat gender-based violence at Nien Hsing factories
- Children's Place, unions, civil rights groups party to accord

Clothing chains Levi Strauss & Co., The Children's Place Inc. and Kontoor Brands Inc agreed to start a pilot program aimed at combating gender-based violence and harassment at five factories owned and operated by supplier Nien Hsing Textile Co. Ltd. in Lesotho.

The accord, backed by civil and women's rights groups, five Lesotho-based labor unions and the U.S.-based Worker Rights Consortium, Solidarity Center and Workers United, will offer protection to more than 10,000 workers in the southern African nation. It follows a Worker Rights Consortium investigation that documented a pattern of abuse and harassment at the factories.

"We strive to ensure a safe and secure workplace for all workers in our factories and are therefore fully committed to implementing this agreement immediately, comprehensively, and with measurable success," Richard Chen, Nien Hsing's chairman, said in an emailed statement.

The pilot program will run for two years, and be funded mostly by the three clothing companies. It also has backing from the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Nien Hsing, which is based in Taiwan, agreed to provide access to its factories for reporting purposes and direct its managers not to retaliate against workers who file complaints. Should the supplier breach the worker-protection agreement, Levi Strauss, The Children's Place and Kontoor Brands have agreed to reduce production orders until it is compliant.

The Worker Rights Consortium investigation found that managers and supervisors coerced many Nien Hsing workers into sexual relationships and subjected them to harassment.

(Updates with finding of investigation at factories in last paragraph.)