



## WORKER RIGHTS CONSORTIUM

January 16, 2009

Chris Champion  
General Counsel  
Russell Corporation  
3350 Riverwood Parkway, Suite 1600  
Atlanta, GA 30339

*Via Electronic Mail*

Dear Chris:

I write you regarding an element of grave concern regarding the Jerzees de Honduras case: the very real risk of violence against Evangelina Argueta and in-plant leaders of the CGT if and when the plant closes, if not before. We consider the risk of violence to be genuine and believe that it warrants urgent precautionary action in light of recent developments, including threats of violence against factory-level union leaders linked directly to the closure and the surveillance of Ms. Argueta by menacing individuals within her home city. As described below, we are asking that Russell Corporation take steps to ensure the safety of these individuals. These steps are enumerated at the end of this letter.

As discussed in our public report, there have been explicit death threats against the leaders of the factory-level union which are related directly to the closure. The factory-level union's president has twice returned to his machine after lunch break to find anonymous notes stating, "You're going to die, because, because of you, the factory is closing." There has also been threatening graffiti written in the plant's men's and women's restrooms. Shortly after the closure was announced on September 8, a message on the men's restroom wall stated, "We're going to put an AK-47 in the president's chest." Threats have also been made to a female worker leader who serves on the union's executive committee. In late September, while outside of work, she was approached by another worker who lives in her neighborhood who told her that "the day the factory closes, I'm going to cut off your heads." Since this threat, the worker has feared for her personal safety and changes her walking route to and from work each day.

There have been recent incidents which make the threat of violence even graver. Most notably, during the holiday period Ms. Argueta was followed in the city of San Pedro Sula by two men on a motorbike. She was not aware she was being followed until she was informed of this by a security guard at a supermarket where she stopped to shop. The security guard told her that when she left her car in the market's parking lot and entered the store, two men followed her by motorcycle into the parking area. They looked into the car from all sides and tried to open the door handles. The security guard believed based on the behavior of these individuals that Ms. Argueta was in danger of being physically harmed. After being informed of this by the security

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guard, Ms. Argueta immediately called the police, who escorted her to her home and she then filed a police report. The security guard later declined to provide a police statement fearing for his own personal safety. Since this incident, Ms. Argueta has feared for her personal safety and has avoided spending time away from her home or office when it is not critical to do so.

There have also been a substantial number of incidents, with the frequency increasing in the past several months following the announcing of the closure, of trucks with tinted windows driving slowly back and forth in front of the CGT office in Honduras. Workers believe they have stopped to take photographs.

Violence against trade unionists in Honduras is a genuine threat. During April 2008, unknown assailants murdered Altigracia Fuentes, the general secretary of Honduras' largest trade union confederation, Confederación de Trabajadores de Honduras (CTH), as well as another leader of the union and their driver. The three were gunned down as they drove home from a meeting regarding a dispute related to the closure of a *maquila* plant. Ms. Fuentes was shot sixteen times. The assassins left her purse containing large amounts of cash, as well as money on the persons of the two other victims, ruling out robbery as the motive for the crime. Additionally, as you may know, a little over a year before her assassination, a labor lawyer with the Christian human rights organization Association for a More Just Society, Dionisio Diaz Garcia, was murdered while working on a labor rights investigation. Prior to his murder, he and other members of the organization had been followed around by men on motorcycles. According to local experts, the strong majority of the nearly dozen trade unionists murdered in Central America over the past several years were murdered by men on motorcycles.

Even if Russell bore no responsibility for the climate of tension in the community, it would be appropriate for the company to take prophylactic measures in these circumstances given the history of violence against labor activists in Honduras. However, Russell bears a special degree of responsibility, because statements by Russell factory managers and supervisors blaming the union for the closure have been a major cause of the problem. I want to be clear that we have no reason whatsoever to believe that anyone connected with Russell is an author of these threats of violence. Nonetheless, we believe Russell has a responsibility to help ensure that strong measures are taken to protect the individuals under threat and that Russell should not exacerbate the situation by shutting down the factory before those protections are in place.

The WRC, along with eight other human and labor rights organizations, submitted the attached petition yesterday to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to direct the government of Honduras to undertake precautionary measures to protect the lives and wellbeing of Ms. Argueta and CGT members. We ask that Russell contact the Commission to support this petition. We also ask that Russell directly contact the Honduran government and ask that it take all precautionary measures necessary to ensure the safety of these individuals.

It will take time for the Commission to process this petition and, assuming it does so, to facilitate the implementation of safety measures on the ground. Given this reality, we believe it is incumbent upon Russell Corporation – even if it does ultimately proceed with the closure of the facility – to delay closure until effective measures are put in place. This is particularly important given that some of the threats are linked directly to the date of closure of the plant.

We hope that Russell Corporation recognizes the dangerous nature of the present situation and gives serious consideration to this information and these requests. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'SN' with a stylized flourish.

Scott Nova