

Minutes of the WRC Board Meeting, June 20, 2019
Held at Georgetown University

Present at the meeting is: Geoff Chatas, Alixe Holcomb, Scott Kelley, Kyle Muncy, and Craig Westemeier of the University Caucus; Julie Farb, Mark Levinson (via phone), Julie Martinez Ortega, and Julie Su (via phone) of the Advisory Council; Elizabeth Carroll, Amber Chan, and April Lopez (via phone) of USAS.

WRC staff members in attendance were: Scott Nova, Ben Hensler, Jessica Champagne, Rola Abimourched, Chelsea Rudman, Vincent DeLaurentis, Penelope Kyritsis, Kimberly Capehart, Laura Gutierrez, and Alex Chan (via phone).

Observers in attendance included: Ana Jimenez, USAS; Sara Van Horn, WRC Intern; Cal Watson, Georgetown University; Don Edwards, Justice & Sustainability Associates.

Guest speaker, Nidia Poitan Franco from JS International (Guatemala), joined for a portion of the meeting.

Alixé, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:18 a.m.

Executive Director's Report

Personnel and Investigations – Jess Champagne

Details on personnel were presented. An overview on the number of investigations in the past year were presented.

University Caucus Review – Alixe Holcomb

Great presentations and agenda. The University Caucus was a productive meeting, and we hope to continue to grow.

Bangladesh Accord – Laura Gutierrez and Scott Nova

Safety improvements in the garment industry in Bangladesh are largely due to the Accord. The safety of garment workers was gravely at risk, as was seen in Rana Plaza and other disasters. A review of progress rates at collegiate factories was presented. Despite extensive progress, there continue to be building safety concerns and fire concerns in non-garment industries. The government in Bangladesh persists in its hostility toward the Accord. A memorandum of understanding between the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association and the steering committee of the Accord was reached. Scott N. expressed concern about some elements of the MOU potentially weakening the Accord. Further updates to come.

Delta Apparel Honduras – Jess Champagne

A brief review of the case was presented. A video from union representatives was shown. A majority of university licensees doing business with Delta ceased relations with the company. Delta and the WRC will meet shortly to discuss remediation. Further developments will be reported in the next few weeks.

PT Kahoiindah Citragarment – Jess Champagne and Scott Nova

A brief review of the case was presented. Fanatics, Gap, and Under Armour have all asked Hojeon to pay workers the money they are legally owed. Nike has also modestly increased its pressure. Hojeon has reached out to the WRC to discuss possible remediation; Scott N. expressed optimism that Hojeon will commit to pay what is owed.

Hetian Taida – Scott Nova

Despite a number of investigative barriers, we can now say we have definitive evidence that Badger was sourcing apparel made with forced labor. Badger is currently in discussion with the WRC on appropriate remediation. Given the practical impossibility of making workers whole in this case, the WRC has recommended Badger instead make a sizeable donation to human rights groups working to aid the Uyghur population in Xinjiang Province. The WRC has also recommended Badger cease all university-related business with Hetian Taida and its parent company. Badger has agreed to these actions. The WRC will be publishing a full report on Hetian Taida within several days.

Invoicing – Kimberly Capehart

There are a number of challenges with the current invoicing system for university fees. A new dynamic invoice will be created for more accurate and efficient processing.

Presentation by Nidia Poitan Franco, Production worker at JS International

Workers at a formerly collegiate factory, JS Guatemala, began to form a union. Union leaders faced enormous pressured not to continue with their unionization efforts, including repeated, explicit death threats. The WRC organized substantial pressure from buyers, which caused some improvements in management’s behavior, but progress to date has been insufficient. We are continuing to engage JS International. The Board heard a presentation via video conference from one of the union leaders, Nidia Poitan Franco, who spoke eloquently about her experience at JS International. Scott N. explained that this case illustrates the enormous obstacles workers still face when they seek to exercise their associational rights in the supply chains of major brands and retailers.

Set Next Board Meeting Date

Friday, October 25, 2019

Executive Session

An executive session was held to discuss confidential personnel, financial, and other matters.

Discussion and Action on Governance Proposal from the University Caucus

Kyle presented a proposal to add an additional University Caucus board member in order to improve the balance of university representation among universities and licensing programs of different sizes. Scott N. explained an element of the proposal: to add this UC seat, while

maintaining equal voting power among the three Board constituencies, the votes would be weighted. Dialogue proceeded and a consensus emerged that it is preferable to add a seat for each constituency rather than have weighted voting. Julie Martinez Ortega moved to amend the bylaws in accordance with the original proposal involving weighted voting. Craig seconded. Julie Farb moved to amend the motion, to instead add three Board seats, one from each constituency (UC, USAS, and Advisory Council). Craig seconded. The motion to amend the motion was approved with all in attendance voting in favor. The amended motion to amend the bylaws was then approved, with all in attendance voting in favor.

Field Reports

Gaha Green – Rola Abimourched

A number of violations were found, including: contracts, wages and hours, time off, occupational health and safety, ergonomics, gender and age discrimination, and other issues.

Crackdown in Bangladesh – Laura Gutierrez

The new minimum wage in Bangladesh is about a fourth of a conservatively-defined living wage and half of the one-dollar-per-hour that unions were seeking. This led to spontaneous wage protests and strikes, at the end of 2018, which were massive and non-violent. As has been the norm in Bangladesh, the government and security forces responded with violent repression and bogus arrests and criminal charges. The employers responded by firing at least 7,500 workers, without legal basis. The WRC issued a detailed report documenting the abuses and is working with a large network of labor and human rights groups to seek remedies.

Direct Ship Americas (DSA) – Jess Champagne

A brief review of this successful, resolved case was presented. A video testimonial was presented to the board. Scott N. noted the exemplary performance of Fanatics, Inc., which ensured that workers at DSA received all legally owed compensation despite the failure of the factory owner to pay.

The meeting was adjourned at: 3:47pm.