

## **Minutes of the WRC Board Meeting September 24, 2021**

The meeting was held remotely, via Zoom.

Present at the meeting were Rachel Duffy, Michael Ferrari, Alixe Holcomb, Kyle Muncy, and Craig Westemeier of the University Caucus; Jill Esbenshade, Julie Farb, Mark Levinson, Julie Martínez Ortega, and Angeles Solis of the Advisory Council; Sarah Guzman, Bryanna Gonzalez, Sarim Karim, Rachana Nettem, Alek Palacios, and Ricardo Perez of USAS.

WRC staff members in attendance were Scott Nova, Ben Hensler, Jessica Champagne, Rola Abimourched, Vincent DeLaurentis, Liana Foxvog, Kimberly Capehart, and Tara Mathur.

Observers in attendance included: Leigha Ellis, USAS, Jess Dampier, USAS, Rebecca Harteker, WRC intern, and Cal Watson, Georgetown University.

Meeting was called to order at 11:02 EDT by Board Chair, Angeles Solis.

### **Board Officer Elections**

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#### ***Board Chair from University Caucus***

Kyle moved to appoint Rachel as Board Chair. Mike seconded the motion. There was no opposition to the approval of the nomination; all board members approved.

#### ***Treasurer from USAS***

Alek moved to appoint himself as Treasurer. Sarim seconded the motion. There was no opposition to the approval of the nomination; all board members approved.

#### ***Secretary from the Advisory Council***

Jill moved to appoint Julie F. as Secretary. Julie M.O. seconded the motion. There was no opposition to the approval of the nomination; all board members approved.

### **Audit Committee Elections**

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#### ***Advisory Council***

Jill moved to appoint Mark to the Audit Committee. Julie M. O. seconded. There was no opposition to the approval of the nomination; all board members approved.

#### ***University Caucus***

Rachel moved to appoint Kyle to the Audit Committee. Craig seconded. There was no opposition to the approval of the nomination; all board members approved.

#### ***USAS***

Alek, as Treasurer, is automatically a member of the Audit Committee.

*Rachel Duffy is now chairing the meeting.*

### **Approval of Minutes of June Board Meeting**

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Kyle moved to approve the June Board Meeting minutes. Craig seconded the motion. There was no opposition to the approval of the minutes; all board members approved.

### **Executive Director's Report**

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#### ***Organizational Updates – Scott Nova***

Scott took a moment to congratulate outgoing WRC Board Member Julie Su on her confirmation by the Senate, in July, as United States Deputy Secretary of Labor.

Scott reviewed the plan for the WRC to lease new office space, noting the advantages of the pending lease, both in terms of cost savings relative to the size, quality, and suitability of the space, and the improvement the space will represent over the WRC's current quarters, which will be too small to house the WRC staff once the organization returns to regular in-office work.

Scott reported on an important personnel change: the departure of the WRC's Field Director for South Asia, Laura Gutierrez. Scott thanked Laura for her eight years of service to the organization, particularly her vital contributions to the implementation of the Bangladesh Accord. Scott reviewed the WRC's current open positions and hiring goals, including Laura's, the position of Director of Development, and the position of Director of Strategic Research.

#### ***Haiti – Tara Mathur***

Tara reported on freedom of association violations at Premium Apparel, a collegiate factory in Haiti producing for Gildan, a supplier of university licensed goods to New Agenda and Top of the World (prior to the latter's acquisition by Fanatics). Tara stated that workers engaged in a peaceful work stoppage in response to workers being called into work and then being dismissed for the day, without pay. Although the factory agreed, in response to the stoppage, to pay workers who were sent home the days' wage, Tara reported that factory management utilized the work stoppage as a pretext for firing a group of union leaders and activists. Tara outlined the WRC's finding that the terminations were illegal under Haitian law and university labor standards and described the WRC's engagement with Gildan regarding appropriate remediation.

Tara then provided an update on violations at many factories in Haiti surrounding health benefits. She explained that many employers fail to make statutorily required payments to the government necessary to maintain workers' access to the Haiti's public health system. The WRC has documented grievous medical outcomes resulting from the loss of access to care, including two deaths. Tara updated the board on the WRC's ongoing efforts to address this problem industry-wide, through engagement with key buyers from the country, including university licensees.

### ***International Safety Accord – Liana Foxvog***

Liana reported on the new agreement, reached in August by brand and labor negotiators, to create a successor program to the Bangladesh Accord, that will both extend the Accord's work in Bangladesh and expand the work to other countries where workers face grave building safety risks. Liana provided an overview of the elements of the new International Accord for Health and Safety in the Textile and Garment Industry. She provided an update concerning university licensee sign-ons to the agreement. Kyle suggested that major retailers, such as B&N and Follett, be asked to encourage licensees to sign on to the new Accord. Liana reviewed recent factory fires, in several countries, that have led to injury and/or death, demonstrating the need for Accord expansion to proceed expeditiously.

### ***Covid-19 – Scott Nova***

Scott discussed the track record of the 2020/2021 apparel industry initiative, known as the 'Covid-19 Call to Action'. This was the industry's primary response to calls from labor and human rights advocates for brands and retailers to provide aid to garment workers facing mass hardship as a result of the pandemic's impact on supply chains. Scott noted that the initiative had produced vanishingly small amounts of support for garment workers—less than a hundredth of a percent of the actual need globally, as estimated by the WRC. Scott characterized the initiative's output as "less than a drop in the bucket". Scott attributed its failure to that fact that it was non-binding and had no clearly defined, time-bound goals.

### **Updating Annual Meeting Schedule**

The board received report-backs from members from each board constituency who have been meeting to discuss potential ideas around the platform and location for future board meetings. No conclusions were reached as to any adjustments in the schedule and format of meetings, but the constituencies will continue to discuss the issue.

### **Set Next Meeting(s) Date and Determine in Person**

The Board decided to hold the next meeting on February 4, 2022, with a tentative plan to hold the meeting in person.

### **Executive Session**

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

Craig moved to adjourn the meeting. Kyle seconded the motion, which carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 4:03 p.m.