

## **Minutes of the WRC Board Meeting September 29, 2023**

The meeting was held at Georgetown University and on Zoom.

Present at the meeting in person were Sam Harasen, Kyle Muncy, Cal Watson, and Craig Westemeier of the University Caucus; Julie Farb, Mark Levinson, Julie Martinez Ortega, and Mark Pearce of the Advisory Council; Madison Allen, Joshua Gavsie, Tanvi Kamath, Fiona Naughton, and Grace Orellana, of USAS.

Board Members attending via Zoom were Jill Esbenshade of the Advisory Council, and Michael Ferrari of the University Caucus.

WRC staff members in attendance in person were Scott Nova, Ben Hensler, Jessica Champagne, Rola Abimourched, and Kimberly Capehart.

WRC staff member Liana Foxvog attended via Zoom.

Observers in attendance in person were Makayla Heiser and Kelsey Coleman of USAS, and Anhiba Singh, WRC legal intern.

Angeles Solis of the Advisory Council; and Alixe Holcomb of the University Caucus were absent.

The meeting was called to order at 9:15 a.m. by the incoming Board Chair, Julie Farb.

### **Ratification of New Members and Election of Officers and Audit Committee**

---

#### ***Election of New Board Members***

September 14, 2023, Shreya Basu moved to ratify the following board members via email:

- Sam Harasen, University of Washington (University Caucus)
- Joshua Gavsie, Georgetown University (USAS)
- Grace Orellana, University of Maryland (USAS)
- Fiona Naughton, Georgetown University (USAS)

A vote was held remotely. All board members voted in favor via online form by September 21, 2023; there was no dissent.

Mark P. moved to ratify the following additional board members:

- Madison Allen, Georgetown University (USAS)
- Tanvi Kamath, Georgetown University (USAS)

Julie M.O. seconded. All board members voted in favor. There was no dissent.

### ***Election of Officers***

Jill nominated Julie F. to be chair. Mark L. seconded. All board members voted in favor.

Julie F. nominated Kyle to be Treasurer. Cal seconded. All board members voted in favor.

Julie F. nominated Fiona to be the Secretary. Craig seconded. All board members voted in favor.

### ***Election of Audit Committee***

Mark L. nominated Julie M.O. Craig seconded. All board members voted in favor.

Fiona nominated Josh. Mark L. seconded. All board members voted in favor.

Scott reminded the Board that as Treasurer, Kyle automatically serves on the Audit Committee.

### **Approval of Agenda and Minutes from the April Board Meeting**

Craig moved to approve the agenda. Kyle seconded. All board members voted in favor.

Craig moved to approve the April Board Meeting minutes. Kyle seconded. All board members voted in favor.

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

#### ***Personnel Updates – Jess Champagne***

Jess introduced three new staff members that recently joined the WRC, including Ariana MacMartin, Communications and Research Associate; a Field Representative in Pakistan; and a Southeast Asia Case Coordinator.

She apprised the Board of the upcoming global all staff meeting in October and invited the board to a dinner on October 18.

#### ***New Affiliation – Jess Champagne***

Jess welcomed our newest affiliate, Northern Arizona University, and thanked Alixe in absentia for her support on their affiliation.

#### ***Hong Seng – Scott Nova***

Scott discussed the wage theft case at Hong Seng Knitting, a collegiate supplier to Nike, located in Thailand. He provided a recap of the case and of Nike's unwillingness to acknowledge the violations. He updated the Board on the WRC's engagement with Nike, and the latter's continued refusal to remediate beyond a handful of workers who won cases at the Thai labor ministry.

Scott noted non-collegiate advocacy work around this case, including actions by investors that are challenging Nike on this issue. Scott expressed his concern that the most prominent licensee in the collegiate sphere is acting with such disregard for university standards in a case that is so clear cut, and the potential precedent-setting nature of a large university licensee not complying with university codes of conduct.

Board members asked a number of clarifying questions and shared additional information about the case and the engagement with Nike.

### ***Pakistan Accord on Health and Safety in the Textile and Garment Industry – Scott Nova***

Scott provided a status update on the Pakistan Accord. He reported that the Accord is now registered as a business in Pakistan and has commenced operations. He noted that there are, at present, 400 factories, supplying 52 brand signatories, covered by the program, and inspections are set to commence in mid-October.

He reviewed the pilot factory safety assessments in Pakistan, noting the factory's owners volunteered their facilities for inspection and the assumption that these factories are therefore likely better than average from a safety standpoint. Scott reported that inspections showed none of the factories had viable fire exits, fire suppression systems, working fire alarms, nor compliant electrical installation and maintenance systems. He reported that the factories in the pilot study agreed to remedy the concerns, and some factories or portions of factories were shut down immediately until safety remedies were completed. Scott said that these pilot inspections underscore the gravity of the safety risks in Pakistan, show that very little progress has been achieved in the country under licensees' – and other brands – existing monitoring programs, and demonstrate why the Accord is so vital to protect workers' safety and lives.

He informed the Board that Gap recently signed the Pakistan Accord. He noted that Gap is one of the largest buyers in Pakistan and, obviously, one of the most prominent apparel brands in the US, and that its decision to sign will hopefully open the door for more non-collegiate US brands to sign. He reviewed the WRC Board's resolution to recommend that universities require licensees to sign on to the Pakistan Accord and reported that almost every university that is a client of CLC has accepted CLC's incorporation of this requirement into its licensing agreements.

Scott also noted that negotiations are underway for the renewal of the International Accord, which includes the Bangladesh Accord.

### ***Department of Labor – Scott Nova***

Scott briefly reviewed the 2018 Lesotho agreements between the brands Kontoor, Levi's, and the Children's Place, and three unions and two women's groups to combat gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH). Scott described the recent MPower event in Lesotho, spearheaded by the US Department of Labor via its MPower program. He noted that the event helped cement the Lesotho government's support of the anti-GBVH program.

### ***Turkey – Scott Nova***

Scott reported on labor rights concerns surrounding garment and textile workers in Turkey in the wake of the earthquake on February 6, 2023. He outlined the WRC's project to urge brands to act responsibly toward suppliers affected by the catastrophe. He said he was pleased to report that most major brands did not impose penalties on factories for shipments delayed by the earthquake, though he noted that pro-active steps to aid suppliers were far less common.

---

## **Field Report – Ben Hensler**

---

### ***Thai Garment Export III (Thailand)***

Ben discussed the case at Thai Garment Export, where 43 Burmese migrant workers were fired without severance. After protracted engagement, Ben reported that the factory agreed to pay 80% of the severance to the workers. After this payment, Ben described the WRC's engagement with the buyers – LL Bean and Burberry – who successfully pressed the factory to pay the remaining 20%.

### ***Westtex (El Salvador)***

Ben reviewed the WRC's investigation at Westtex, a factory that produces collegiate apparel for 47 Brand and Next Level and non-collegiate apparel for Gap and Disney. After a complaint from workers, Ben reported that the WRC found that the factory illegally fired five union leaders. He added that the government of El Salvador ruled that these five firings were illegal. He stated that the remediation in this case is reinstatement with full back pay, but that Westtex has only carried out partial remediation. While the WRC was engaging extensively with brands to press for remediation, Ben reported that the factory suspended an additional 300 workers, including 15 union leaders. He noted that the WRC is now investigating these firings as well.

### ***Palm Apparel and Centri Group (Haiti)***

Ben provided a brief overview of the political and human rights crisis in Haiti, explaining that despite the breakdown of political and social order, apparel workers have continued to advocate for their rights and that the WRC has worked in recent months on a number of cases in the country.

Ben reviewed the WRC's factory investigation at Palm Apparel, a factory that closed and violated union leaders' right to freedom of association when they withheld offers of employment at another facility the factory owned, an offer which was only withheld from the union leaders, who were deemed "people who create trouble". Ben reported that the WRC's intervention led to the union leaders receiving back pay and a promise to be hired at the new facility. Ben stated that the WRC is continuing to monitor the situation to ensure workers are hired as agreed.

Ben also reviewed the successful remediation of violations at another factory in Haiti, Centri Group, which illegally fired 64 workers in retaliation for their striking over unpaid overtime. Ben reported that the WRC's intervention led to both back pay and rehiring. He concluded that while not all workers have yet been rehired, the WRC is continuing to monitor to ensure full remediation.

Kyle added that Gildan, one of the brands involved, is a major blanks brand, and though non-collegiate in this case, they are still significant as a blanks supplier to collegiate licensees.

### ***Niagara (Bangladesh)***

Ben reported on a factory investigation at Niagara, a factory in Bangladesh supplying Cutter and Buck. He described two vehicular incidents where a total of six workers were seriously injured, and one worker died. He explained how the factory induced injured workers to resign with

promises of severance to help cover medical costs; however, after resigning, the workers did not receive severance and were not reinstated.

After the WRC intervened, Ben reported that the factory paid workers in full for their medical bills; the factory increased compensation to the family of the deceased worker; workers who were tricked into resigning were reinstated with back pay; and the factory implemented greater safety measures to prevent vehicular accidents.

### ***Murder of Union Leader (Bangladesh)***

Ben reported that Shahidul Islam, a union leader in Bangladesh, was murdered after engaging in associational activity at a local factory. After leaving the factory, Shahidul and two others were accosted, and while two of them were able to flee, Shahidul was unable to escape and was beaten to death. The criminals responsible have apparent ties to the factory management. Ben also informed the Board that another leader from this union was the victim of a notorious murder 11 years ago. Jess commented on the chilling effect Shahidul's murder has had on the ability of workers in Bangladesh to exercise their associational rights.

### ***Suditi (India)***

Ben reviewed the WRC's factory investigation which found a range of violations, including unpaid wages and severe fire safety deficiencies. Through off-site interviews, the WRC determined that there were a significant number of workers who were not on payroll and were being paid sub-minimum wages with no legally required benefits, such as an annual holiday bonus.

Ben discussed the WRC's engagement with the factory and the collegiate supplier, Camp David, which included pressing for a certified fire safety engineer to examine the factory. Before such an assessment could be completed, the owners decided to close the factory and move to another building. Ben described ongoing remediation efforts in the case.

### **Set the Next Board Meeting Date**

---

The Board agreed to meet on Friday, February 2, 2023.

The Board reviewed the format of the board meetings and adjacent meetings and agrees to hold optional, topical briefings the day before the autumn board meetings and individual caucus meetings in the winter. There will be no adjacent meetings in the spring.

### **Executive Session**

---

An executive session was held to discuss confidential financial, administrative, and programmatic matters.

Kyle moved to adjourn. Sam seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 3:05 p.m.