

## **Minutes of the WRC Board Meeting November 15, 2024**

The meeting was held at Georgetown University and on Zoom.

Present at the meeting in person were Michael Ferrari, Kyle Muncy, Cal Watson, and Craig Westemeier of the University Caucus; Julie Farb and Julie Martínez Ortega of the Advisory Council; Christian Heller of USAS.

Board Members attending via Zoom were Jill Esbenshade and Mark Levinson of the Advisory Council.

WRC staff members in attendance in person were Scott Nova, Ben Hensler, Jessica Champagne, Rola Abimourched, Tara Mathur, Sarah Reed, and Ariana MacMartin.

WRC staff members Liana Foxvog and Vincent Holmes attended via Zoom.

Observers in attendance in person were Shreya Basu of USAS; and Bill Cheng, WRC legal intern.

Mark Pearce and Angeles Solis of the Advisory Council; Sam Harasen and Alixe Holcomb of the University Caucus; Caro Bewley, Aidan Moore, and Gray Ren of USAS were absent.

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

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

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

On November 1, 2024, Grace moved, and Fiona seconded, to ratify the following board members via email:

- Caro Bewley, Tufts University (USAS)
- Christian Heller, Kent State University (USAS)
- Aidan Moore, Whittier College (USAS)
- Gray Ren, University of Southern California (USAS)

A vote was held remotely. A majority of board members voted in favor via online form by November 12, 2024; there were no nay votes.

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

Kyle nominated Mike to be the Board Chair. Craig seconded. All board members voted in favor. Christian nominated himself to be Treasurer. Kyle seconded. All board members voted in favor. Julie F. nominated Jill to be the Secretary. Kyle seconded. All board members voted in favor.

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

Julie M.O. nominated herself for the Advisory Council seat on the Audit Committee. Kyle seconded. All board members voted in favor.

Cal nominated Kyle for the University Caucus seat on the Audit Committee. Mike seconded. All board members voted in favor.

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

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

Mike proposes an edit to the minutes: the minutes should reflect that Mike was absent during the June meeting. Mike motioned to approve the agenda and to amend and approve the minutes. Kyle seconded. All board members voted in favor.

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

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

Jess provided an update on WRC staffing to the board.

#### ***Norwegian Pension Fund Ethics Council – Scott Nova***

Scott provided an update on the WRC's work with the Norwegian Pension Fund. Board members inquired about the scope of the work. Scott replied that the factories are selected in consultation with the Ethics Council with a focus on feasibility.

#### ***Industrial Hana – Tara Mathur***

Tara provided an overview of a WRC investigation at Industrial Hana, a non-collegiate garment factory in Guatemala that permanently closed its operations in October 2023 and failed to pay legally required severance to employees, with a total of \$1.5 million owed. She stated that the factory produced garments under subcontracting relationships with other local manufacturers for brands such as Lucky Brand (owned by Authentic, SPARC, and Shein), American Eagle Outfitters, and Puma. She reported that the WRC engaged with factory buyers, resulting in American Eagle Outfitters and Puma agreeing to each provide \$500,000 to workers. She added that the WRC continues to engage with Lucky Brand and its owners to encourage this remaining brand to contribute the remainder.

Ben informed the board that the WRC received a cease-and-desist letter from a law firm in Los Angeles representing SPARC. This letter claimed that our assertion that the factory supplied Lucky Brand products was unfair and inaccurate. Ben countered that the WRC's description of the factory's relationship with Lucky Brand was indeed accurate.

Scott emphasized that the WRC's recent achievements in convincing brands to compensate workers for severance theft represented a paradigm shift in the industry's approach to this issue, with brands accepting a level of financial responsibility that was unheard of 15 years ago and still relative rare in the late 2010s.

#### ***Bangladesh Country Update – Thulsi Narayanasamy***

Thulsi reported on the recent political upheaval in Bangladesh, which culminated in the ousting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. She noted the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) had played a crucial role in propping up the previous regime and highlighted the significant curtailment of civil liberties that had occurred under Hasina's

administration. Thulsi described the protests that erupted across the country. She stated that Dr. Mohamed Yunus had been appointed to lead the interim government, sparking hopes for a democratic renewal. She explained that this unprecedented moment presented both challenges and opportunities, as there was a strong push to implement changes that would enhance worker rights.

Scott advised the board that he would be going to Bangladesh next week, along with US Government officials and brands, to discuss labor issues with the interim Bangladeshi government officials and various stakeholders.

### ***Cambodia Country Update – Jess Champagne***

Jess briefly reviewed the WRC's history with CENTRAL, a key NGO partner in Cambodia. She reported on the current targeting of the organization by the government at the behest of factory owners. Board members discussed strategy around brand engagement on this issue.

### **Executive Session**

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

Mike moved to adjourn. Cal seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 2:56 p.m.