



December 11, 2007

### **Statement by FLA President on Freedom of Speech and Expression**

The Fair Labor Association (FLA) is a collaborative initiative of companies, NGOs, universities and colleges, and suppliers to promote respect for labor standards in global supply chains. We recognize the importance of, and rely on, cooperation amongst stakeholders to make corporate social responsibility a reality. Labor rights NGOs play a crucial role in raising important issues on behalf of workers who are often unrepresented and highly vulnerable. Companies may disagree with the findings and recommendations of NGOs, but their reports often lead to dialogue from which all parties, especially workers, can benefit. This multi-party dialogue is an essential mechanism for addressing abuses and promoting respect for labor rights in the workplace. Surveys reveal that public opinion places a higher degree of trust in NGOs than in government and businesses, and NGOs serve in many ways as the conscience of society. The stands they take on issues are often unpopular and uncomfortable but always vital. The recent legal action by the Indian company Fibres and Fabrics International (FFI) against local and international NGOs and companies is troubling and detrimental to all efforts to improve working conditions in the global supply chain.

The Constitution of India recognizes the right to freedom of speech and expression and the right to form associations. These are also rights that FLA constituents defend through our Workplace Code of Conduct, and we urge you to ensure that they continue to be enjoyed by all the parties in the case involving FFI and the NGOs. Dialogue, and when that breaks down, mediation, is always more effective than gagging orders and court cases. We encourage the parties to meet in order to resolve differences that will only be heightened by legal action.

Auret van Heerden  
President  
Fair Labor Association