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American consumers have a long history of acting in support of the rights of workers who produce the goods they wear and consume. From the National Consumers League's work at the turn of the 20th century to combat sweatshop abuses and develop a union label for consumers, to solidarity boycotts of table grapes in support of California farm workers in the late 1960s and again in the 1980s, American consumers have time and again demonstrated their commitment to ethical consumerism. The 1990s were a decade of student solidarity with workers in sweatshops throughout the developing world, as thousands of college students organized on campuses around the United States to insist that their universities commit to sweatfree procurement of university-licensed apparel.

It is time for fresh thinking and new approaches to 'the sweatshop problem.' In the 1990s many activists in the anti-sweatshop movement throughout North America and Western Europe focused time and attention on the codes of conduct and voluntary monitoring initiatives being developed by the garment and footwear industries and by 'multi-stakeholder' groups. While these initiatives all have their role in monitoring or otherwise working to improve factory conditions, it is clear that consumers in the US are ready to support more progressive and positive approaches. In short, it is finally possible to develop and support truly sweatfree apparel, and the universities are well-positioned to lead the way.

The trend toward ethical consumerism is real, well-documented by the media, and supported by academic research. In recent months articles have appeared regularly in the *New York Times*, *Financial Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and other leading publications highlighting new initiatives directed at ethical consumers, from the "Edun" clothing brand to the new Red initiative unveiled at the Davos World Economic Forum meetings in January 2006. The Fair Trade certification system has notably taken advantage of the desire of ethical consumers for better assurances of fair practices and treatment of those who labor to produce the goods they consume. Experimental research from the University of Michigan (available through ILRF) provides credible data to indicate a similar market exists for ethical apparel.

How do we get beyond corrective programs and actually promote positive alternatives? The Designated Supplier Program offers the best current hope to the market to do just that. Like the fair trade system, which in principle guarantees consumers that the products they purchase are made by democratic farmer cooperatives in which producers are truly empowered and receive a living wage for their product, similarly the Designated Supplier Program would provide assurances to consumers about empowerment and the existence of a living wage in factories. Specifically, the Designated Supplier Program promotes empowered workplaces—workplaces where workers enjoy the benefit of a democratic union and the protection of a negotiated collective bargaining agreement. Workers additionally benefit from the assurance that a premium wage will be paid for the benefit of the assurance of sweatfree conditions in

their factory. The thinking behind this program represents a tremendous step forward for workers and their allies in the anti-sweatshop movement. While reactive programs will still be necessary, at least in the immediate future, for the majority of the world's workplaces, the Designated Supplier Program will finally allow workers and activists to take a proactive approach by enabling consumers to connect directly with, and support through their purchasing, empowered workplaces around the world.

ILRF strongly supports this positive and proactive approach to supporting empowered workplaces. All too often, we have stood in solidarity with sweatshop workers throughout prolonged struggles for their rights, enjoyed the fruits of victory with these workers as they finally won union recognition, and then, tragically stood by to witness as buyers fled from the factory in search of cheaper production elsewhere in the world. It is vital that we maintain support for empowered workplaces by maintaining and increasing purchasing, wherever possible, in these empowered workplaces. We believe this is realistic and achievable. We are encouraged by the recent exponential growth of the market for Fair Trade certified products in the United States, and by the trend of some institutions, particularly faith-based institutions, to make a commitment to exclusive purchase of ethically-produced goods.

Support for a new initiative need in no way conflict with continued support and engagement with initiatives designed to provide monitoring and remediation in apparel factories. The global apparel industry is immense, and existing initiatives have barely begun to penetrate the vast supply chain. We do not believe the Designated Supplier Program, nor any other single approach, provides the 'magic bullet' to solve the world's sweatshop problems. We encourage continued development of better legal standards to protect workers, and broad-based multi-stakeholder initiatives to promote continued improvements to this and other industries.

US universities have shown already that they are willing to take the high road in regard to apparel and other licensed products, and we are hopeful that they will be first-movers with regard to the exciting new approach of the Designated Supplier Program. For our part ILRF will strive to ensure that more and more of our allies around the world are aware of this new initiative, as we are confident it will lend new fire to their work to ensure that even more workers transform their workplaces into empowered workplaces.

ILRF has long been committed to a vision of a global economy in which all workers enjoy full protection for their basic rights and their dignity. While no single program or approach can deliver this lofty goal, we are excited by the Designated Supplier Program and believe it holds great promise as an important tool to move us toward this ultimate goal. We encourage all our friends and allies to work together in support of this approach.

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