



Committee Chair Report

ILO – International Labor Organization

Chair: Nicole Rysanek

Deputy Chair: Karun Gauthaman

Personal Statements:

Chair – Nicole Rysanek:

Hello everybody, my name is Nicole Rysanek, I am Canadian, and I am a tenth-grade student at ACS Hillingdon, in London, England. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to be your Head Chair for this committee, alongside my Deputy Chair, Karun. This will be my fifth conference, and my first time attending MUNISS – a

May I welcome you to the ILO committee – The International Labour Organization, set to discuss our three topics surrounding workers' rights, economics, and labour conditions, in order to advance social and economic justice. This is an Intermediate Committee, and therefore a fruitful debate is highly anticipated throughout the conference, beginner delegates included! This is an amazing opportunity, and an equally important experience – a good tip is to make the most out of lobbying, don't spend it sitting in a corner!

Good luck, and always have fun!

Deputy Chair – Karun Gauthaman:

Hello everyone, my name is Karun Gauthaman, and I am 14 years old. I have been to some MUN conferences before and have been a delegate twice so far. I am a student at this school, - ISS, and I'm excited to participate as a deputy chair in this year's MUNISS. This is my first time chairing as a deputy chair, and I will be supporting the head chair - Nicole.

MUNISS is an annual conference that we host, and this year you all will be part of the International Labour Council, otherwise known as the ILO. We will be discussing and debating several topics, and end up with a final resolution for each of the topics.

Hope you all have fun in this conference/committee, and good luck debating!

Introduction:

Introduction of the International Labor Council (ILO):

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is part of the United Nations and focuses on making sure people everywhere have good working conditions. It was created in 1919 and now has 183 countries as members. The ILO helps set rules for work and checks if countries are following them, though it can't punish governments.

Glossary

- International Labour Organization (ILO): A UN agency that sets global labor standards and protects workers' rights.
- Working Conditions: Environment and circumstances in which work is performed, including factors like wages and safety.
- Clothing Industry: The sector involved in designing, making, and selling clothing.
- Southeast Asia: Region of Asia including countries like Thailand, Vietnam, and Indonesia.
- Labour Rights: Fundamental protections for workers, including fair wages and safe working conditions.
- Remuneration: The amount of money someone is paid to act.

Issue Explanation:

The present situation concerning labor rights and working conditions, particularly in industries like clothing manufacturing in Southeast Asia, presents a variety of challenges. Many workers in this region face complicated and inhumane employment situations, including, but not limited to, low wages, long hours, and unsafe working conditions. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), issues such as forced labor, child labor, and insufficient wages are prevalent in the garment industry, particularly in countries like Bangladesh and Cambodia (“Global Estimates of Child Labour”). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has further heightened existing vulnerabilities, with countless reports of job losses, reduced incomes, and rising health risks for workers in these industries (“COVID-19 and the world of work”).

The consequences of these challenges extend beyond mere economic concerns; they also have significant humanitarian implications. Poor working conditions contribute to the exploitation and vulnerability of workers, jeopardizing their physical and mental well-being. For instance, unsafe working environments can lead to injuries, illnesses, and even fatalities among workers, as evidenced by incidents such as the Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh in 2013, which claimed over 1,100 lives (The Guardian). Moreover, inadequate wages maintain cycles of poverty and remove access to essential services like healthcare and education for workers and their families (“ILO Global Wage Report”).

Failure to address these issues not only fosters human suffering but also poses broader risks for the global community. Exploitative labor practices can fuel social unrest and instability within affected countries, potentially leading to political instability and conflict. Moreover, the interconnected nature of the global economy means that issues such as forced labor and substandard working conditions in one region can have ripple effects across supply chains, affecting businesses and consumers worldwide. Furthermore, ethical considerations increasingly influence consumer behavior and corporate practices, meaning that companies implicated in labor rights violations may face reputational damage and legal repercussions (“Supply Chains”).

In summary, the present situation regarding labor rights and working conditions, particularly in industries like clothing manufacturing in Southeast Asia, represents a complex humanitarian and economic challenge. Failure to address these issues not only fosters human suffering and social inequality but also poses risks to global and economic sustainability. Thus, concerted efforts at both the national and international levels are essential to address these challenges comprehensively and ensure decent work for all.

History of the Topic:

Why Southeast Asia is the Top Garment Manufacturing Region

It is due to a variety of reasons that Southeast Asia has specifically become the largest producer in the garments industry. One of the most important is the lack of laws and regulations within the sector itself. If we look at the other side of the globe, in the United States, there have been more laws being passed and processed than ever before. One of these laws was adopted in California – the Garment Worker Protection Act (Senate Bill 62) (State of California Department Of Industrial Relations). First coming into effect in January 2022, this bill requires employees within the garment industry to be paid an hourly wage, no less than the minimum wage. Another bill currently being proposed on the East Coast, is the New York Fashion Sustainability and Social Accountability Act – requiring companies in the industry ‘to map their supply chains and address the human rights and environmental impacts of their operations and supply chain’ (Sedex). Acts as such are role models towards establishing a more humane, and eco-friendly garments industry. However, the issue isn’t as simple as it may be in the United States.

It is important to recognize why many countries in Southeast Asia aren’t so quick to implement similar laws as stated above – the industry greatly contributes to merchandising exports (91 percent in Bangladesh, 66 percent in Cambodia, 58 percent in Pakistan, 45 percent in Sri Lanka, and 22 percent in Vietnam). Therefore, implementing stricter laws likely means that a significant decrease in profits will be seen initially, and as many of these nations involved already have lower GDP, this isn’t something they can necessarily afford. Therefore, solutions must be found to implement regulations, whilst also keeping countries such as Vietnam or Bangladesh on the same economic trajectory.

Unsafe Work Environments

Not only are garment workers being treated inhumanely via low wages and long hours, but even more pressing are the unsafe work environments in which all these issues occur. A key example of this is the Collapse of Rana Plaza – a multi-story building providing shops, banks, and garment factories, located in Dhaka, Bangladesh. A day before the incident, on the 23rd of April 2013, immense cracks in the structure of the building were discovered, and yet these warnings for evacuation were ignored specifically by the owners of the garment factories. The following day, as all the garment workers returned to work, the building collapsed, bringing death tolls to 1,134 and approximately 2600 injuries, many of which have life-long severities. This incident has been described as ‘the worst ever industrial incident to hit the garment industry’ (Clean Clothes).

Rana Plaza is just one of many other fatal factory collapse incidents, with others reported in China (such as the Zhejiang shoe-factory collapse in 2015), Pakistan (2012 factory fire burning 300 to death), and in India, where a fire broke out within an unlicensed firework factory, horrifically killing around 40 people. All these incidents were not per chance, but rather deliberate humanitarian abuse due to ignored safety warnings.

Unethical Practices and the Leading Garment Companies Involved

Fast fashion practices have not been around for long but were rather introduced in the last century. Clothes shopping was not a regular occurrence for a few reasons, most commonly we assume it had to do with a lack of money, but it relies on the source – the way garments are manufactured has significantly changed. In the 19th century, the process of making garments started with the customer itself; you had to source your own materials, prepare them, weave them, and then make the clothes. However, fast fashion practices are very different. Garments are manufactured and sold at rapidly high rates, the turnover for certain trends and seasons is faster than ever before, and the quality of materials has lowered, meaning they are much more accessible and affordable. The profits greatly outweigh the production costs for leading companies.

Top leading garment companies involved in this topic include H&M, Zara, and Primark. A press release from the Clean Clothes Organization in 2022 mentions that workers supplying some of these top companies reported inhumane practices, such as exits being blocked, explosions, and exposure to electrical discharge and harmful substances. Within these factories in Southeast Asia, unethical practices can be seen throughout all aspects.

Main Solutions Proposed

Regarding the issue of worker conditions in the garment industry in Southeast Asia, various solutions have been proposed, however, they each come with their advantages and disadvantages. Primary solutions are those surrounding the enforcement, and implementation of labor standards within these involved sub-industries, and nations. As many solutions, this would be extremely effective, however so often they are not implemented, or enforced to the highest standard. This means that gaps remain, whether that's legally, or that they aren't being strictly enforced - the ILO is the source for change. Within this committee, lots can be done to target this solution and recraft it for the most effective results.

Additionally, supply chain traceability has also been a main solution, especially in recent years. However, this is again a complicated solution. It requires transparency – something businesses involved in this issue are not so willing to adhere to. By offering transparency about which factories are used for supply, and workers involved, this solution promotes

the safeguarding of working conditions for all. Therefore, there must be a change in how this solution is promoted. It is valuable for this main solution, which is falling apart, to be discussed before it is too late.

Any Previous Attempts

- The 8 ILO Fundamental Conventions
 1. Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)
 - a. Served the purpose of suppressing and condemning the use of forced labour in all fields, with the exception of compulsory military service.
 2. Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)
 - a. Aims to take effective measures to secure the immediate and complete abolition of forced or compulsory labour.
 3. Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)
 - a. Promotes the safeguarding of worker and employer rights to form and join organizations of their choice, without interference. In all, this convention aims for an outcome of social justice in the workplace.
 4. Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)
 - a. Ensures workers have the right to organize freely and bargain collectively with employers. This promotes fair labour practices and industrial relations.
 5. Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)
 - a. Promotes gender equality, ensuring that both men and women are paid equally, without discrimination.
 6. Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)
 - a. Adopted in 1958, this convention prohibits discrimination in the workplace based on race, sex, religion, political beliefs, nationality, and ethnicity to promote equal opportunities and fair treatment for all.
 7. Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)
 - a. Sets the minimum age for employment to be 15 years old and reduced to 14 years old in less economically and educationally developed countries.
 8. Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)
 - a. Seeks for the protection of children, and eradication of child labour in forms such as slavery, trafficking, dangerous work, and more. As a result, this promotes children's rights to educational opportunities.

- The International ACCORD for Health and Safety in the Textile and Garment Industry
 - First established in 2012 as a five-year agreement between retailers, global trade unions, and other stakeholders, to commit towards a safer environment for those working in the garment industry. Originally, there were 50 signatories total, and as of 2023 (the latest renewal) there are more than 175.

- Better Work Vietnam
 - Established in 2009, operating in countries within Southeast Asia and beyond, such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, with the aim to 'improve the working conditions and competitiveness' within the industry.

Involved Parties

This section highlights the involved parties in this committee, specifically at the MUNISS 2024 conference.

Primarily involved nations:

- Bangladesh
- India
- China
- Philippines
- Indonesia

The following nations are secondarily involved due to their importation of goods coming from the Southeast Asia region.

- United States
- United Kingdom
- Canada
- (Other European countries)

Involved NGOs, aid organizations, and UN agencies:

- Clean Clothes Campaign (CC)
 - An international network, comprising both labour rights organizations and trade unions, both committed to improving working conditions and empowering workers in the garment and textile industries.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
 - Dedicated to promoting sustainable development and improving living standards, including labor rights and working conditions.
- Amnesty International

- Investigates and campaigns against human rights abuses, with the inclusion of labor rights violations in the garment and textiles industry.
- Oxfam
 - Strives to alleviate issues such as poverty and inequality, whilst advocating for fair labor practices and worker rights within the garment industry, and other industries.

Media Contribution:

Coverage of working conditions in the clothing industry in Southeast Asia often highlights the stark realities faced by garment workers, including low wages, long hours, and unsafe working conditions. Reports frequently feature interviews with workers themselves, as well as insights from labor rights advocates and organizations working to improve conditions. While some stories acknowledge efforts by governments and companies to address these issues, there is often skepticism about the effectiveness of such measures and calls for more substantial reforms. Overall, the coverage underscores the need for greater transparency, accountability, and collaboration among stakeholders to ensure fair and safe working conditions in the industry.

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