Why do we need transparency?

Supply chains in the global garment industry are complex, and often the details are hidden from us. We do know that unsafe working conditions, extremely low wages and suppression of unions are found in the industry.

Brands are aware that if customers knew that the workers who make their clothes cannot afford to live in dignity, it would make people think twice before buying their clothes. No one wants to feel that the clothes that they are wearing have been stitched in unsafe conditions or that workers have not been paid fairly for their labour. Without knowing where clothes were made, we can’t make informed choices or hold brands to account for these conditions. So brands work hard to make sure that we never find out.

As long as brands are able to keep working conditions hidden within their supply chains, no one can be sure that companies are meeting their responsibilities to identify, and take action to prevent, human rights abuses in their supply chains.
Transparency helps workers to claim their rights

Wages and employment conditions
Knowing the average wages of workers on different grades within a factory and across similar factories allows unions to scrutinise whether wages are fair and enough to live on. Transparency at the bottom of the supply chains is extremely important. Women, migrant workers and homeworkers are particularly vulnerable to low-paid, exploitative employment. Shedding light on the most vulnerable workers in the supply chains, means that unions and human rights defenders can ensure that nobody gets left behind in the struggle for a living wage.

Union rights
Brands should support unions and collective bargaining agreements in supplier factories and should collect information about how workers in their supply chains are able to use collective bargaining in order to improve working conditions. With more information publicly available, unions and human rights defenders will be able to identify brands’ suppliers and inform and organise their workers to ensure they are getting fair wages and conditions.

Transparency helps customers to make informed choices and hold brands to account

Having information publicly available will allow a concerned customer to check where a brand makes its clothes, and whether the factories pay fair wages, allow unions to operate and manage safety risks.

Consumer organisations and other stakeholders can investigate and verify claims made by brands on their efforts to ensure fair and safe conditions.

Shedding light on the most vulnerable workers in the supply chains, means that unions and human rights defenders can ensure that nobody gets left behind in the struggle for a living wage
Brands must step up and go transparent

- Brands that haven’t already done so, need to sign the Transparency Pledge as soon as possible.
- Brands must disclose data using machine readable supplier lists, including gender breakdown of roles in each factory, migrant workers as share of workforce in each factory, and presence of unions or worker committees in each factory.
- Brands must disclose data on the lowest wage level paid by each supplier in each production country, for a full working week, excluding overtime, benefits and bonuses.

Governments must also act. Precise state guidance and legislation is needed to make sure all brands make supplier information public and expand the scope of information to also include audit reports and corrective action plans.

Brands that haven’t already done so, need to sign the Transparency Pledge as soon as possible

What can we do?

We should all take more interest in the stories behind our clothes, where they have come from, the workers who made them and human rights issues within the supply chain.

One way we can find out more information about brands and their supply chain is to use the Fashion Checker tool. This tool enables us to find out how transparent apparel and footwear brands are about their supply chains and also shows us how to take action to pressure brands to do better!
Labour Behind the Label campaigns for garment workers’ rights worldwide. We support garment workers’ efforts to improve their working conditions and change the fashion industry for the better. We raise awareness, provide information and promote international solidarity between workers and consumers.

We represent the Clean Clothes Campaign in the UK.

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