



DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS IN UNIVERSITY SUPPLY CHAINS

people & planet

student action on world poverty and the environment



INTRODUCTION

How would you feel if you went into work tomorrow, and were told that weekends had been abolished, your boss will now hit you if don't like it, and you have to work 16 hours a day for pennies? This is a reality for many people. All over the world, factory workers, mainly women, are forced to labour in unbearable conditions. They slave away in factories for 16 hours a day for poverty wages. They are denied basic rights and subjected to abuse. These factories are often referred to as 'sweatshops'.

While we hear a lot about 'sweatshops' that make clothes, workers toil in these conditions

to make almost everything. Our computers, phones, stationery and furniture are all part of this global market. Many of them are made by sweatshop workers.

Universities play a major role in this exploitation. The UK higher education sector spends £8 billion a year on buying items like these.

People & Planet's Buy Right campaign is about students taking action to bring about a better life for the people who make these products for universities. Student activists are lobbying, petitioning, demonstrating and taking direct

action to push for human rights. We are campaigning to bring about a more just, more equal and more sustainable world.

This guide will tell you what's wrong with sweatshops and what you can do to combat them. It will give you the basic tools to take on big brands and show you, with real-life success stories, how students can fight and win. This is an introductory guide for anyone who wants to bring about lasting, positive change.



SWEATSHOPS AND YOUR UNIVERSITY



"I CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHY UNIVERSITIES AREN'T ACTING ON THIS ISSUE. I BUY QUITE A LOT OF CLOTHES ON CAMPUS. THE UNIVERSITY HAS NO IDEA WHO MAKES IT. I COULD BE WEARING CLOTHES STITCHED BY CHILDREN OR PEOPLE IN POVERTY. THAT'S SICK. WE NEED ACTION."

Max Rayner, student at University of Nottingham

"I work 16 hours a day hand-sewing clothing. I was bought from my parents' village and taken to New Delhi by train, he says. 'The men came looking for us in July. They had loudspeakers in the back of a car and told my parents that, if they sent me to work in the city, they won't have to work in the farms. My father was paid a fee for me and I was brought down with 40 other children. The journey took 30 hours and we weren't fed. I've been told I have to work off the fee the owner paid for me so I can go home, but I am working for free. It has been like this for four months.'" Amitosh, a child working as a slave labourer in India



Most university products are bought from big brands. These companies are usually vast and often very powerful. Their main motivation is profit. Often, they produce in the Global South where they can buy cheap labour and pretend that their workers' conditions have nothing to do with them.

Sweatshop workers, mostly women, work in hot,

sweatshop conditions for less than a dollar a day, making goods for these companies. Some are not even paid at all. Our universities buy from companies that use sweatshops. They fund this exploitation, often with little knowledge of the lives of the people who make their clothes.

It's important to understand though, that sweatshop

workers are not charity cases. They are fighting every day to get better working conditions and improve their lives. They form trade unions and struggle against factory management for decent pay, hours and benefits. When students work with them, huge changes are possible. The best way to do that is to get your university to join the Worker Rights Consortium.



CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY? YEAH, RIGHT!

For decades, corporations have paid lip service to social justice concerns. They produce glossy leaflets and high-visibility media drives to show just how much they care about people. Behind the spin, however, when corporations aren't kept in check, they carry on with business as usual.

They may put paltry investments into sustainability, but they continue to plunder the planet. They might bring out a brochure showing how nice they are to workers, but they continue to buy from sweatshops.

The reality is that, when their main motivation is profit, you can't rely on them to regulate themselves. We need to independently check their claims to social responsibility. And when it's clear they are not acting to defend human rights, we need to hit them where it hurts – in their wallets.

THE WORKER RIGHTS CONSORTIUM

The Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) monitors factories that make clothes for universities. It was set up in 2002 by students in the USA who wanted to combat the use of sweatshops to make clothes for their universities.

Rather than relying on infrequent checks by an outsider with a clipboard, workers themselves are trained in labour rights, and can lodge a confidential complaint if they believe that there has been a violation of their rights in their workplace. The WRC then conducts an independent in-depth investigation and makes the results public. One hundred and eighty universities in the USA have become members of the WRC, and another six in Canada.

"We've organized a union, have a living wage and fair conditions, so we have a better life. It's a huge contribution to our community which has suffered so much from unemployment and poverty."

Mariza Vargas, trade unionist in Dominican Republic

When universities affiliate to the WRC, corporations that supply them can't any longer deny knowledge of the factories that make their clothing. They have to declare the locations of all their factories, and these are published on the WRC website.

The WRC is based on workers' views of their own conditions. It bases its reports and investigations on complaints by people who work in the factories. It looks thoroughly into the whole factory and works on an ongoing basis with workers in them to find out exactly how their lives are being affected. Every detail is published on the WRC's website for anyone to view. There's no room for corporate cover-ups.

Truth is a very powerful weapon. The threat of universities finding out about abuses is often enough to get corporations to shift direction. When that's not enough, students have concrete facts on which to base their actions and push for more ethical products.

Students have already used the Worker Rights Consortium to make a real difference.

HOW STUDENTS HAVE USED THE WRC

Fruit of the Loom

In November 2008, Fruit of the Loom's subsidiary Russell Athletic illegally closed its Jerzees de Honduras factory shortly after workers formed a trade union. The closure left 1800 people with families jobless. Reports from the Worker Rights Consortium concluded that the motive in closing the factory was, at least in part, to stop workers from forming a union.

Students groups across the world, including People & Planet in the UK, responded by campaigning in solidarity with the Honduran workers. They pressured their universities who sold branded Fruit of the Loom and

Russell Athletic garments to boycott the corporation. 9 UK Universities and over 100 universities worldwide boycotted Fruit of the Loom/ Russell Athletic.

It was the largest ever garment boycott in history and resulted in a huge success. In November 2009, Fruit of the Loom agreed to re-hire all its workers, complete with better pay and conditions, and not to prevent workers in any of their other Honduran factories from unionising.

Nike

Nike agreed to pay \$1.5 million legally mandated severance pay to Honduran workers after People & Planet

joined the United Students Against Sweatshops campaign calling on Nike to 'Just Pay It!'. Reports from the WRC showed that workers had been denied their legal right to redundancy pay after factory closures meant thousands of people lost their jobs.

In July 2010 our American friends at United Students Against Sweatshops asked the People & Planet network to join their campaign against Nike. We sent a letter calling on Nike to pay the money, or we would ask our student network if they wanted to start a boycott. Nike backed down two weeks later and paid the money in full.

HOW FAR WE'VE COME ALREADY

The campaign has only been running since late 2009 and already we are making massive headway. Students all over the country have mobilised for workers rights and brought about some serious changes.

We are rapidly making the case for the Worker Rights Consortium in the UK. National Union of Students Services Limited (NUSSS) is the purchasing body for nearly all students' unions in the UK. It has now affiliated to the WRC, bringing 220 students' unions with it. That means when

your union buys products from NUSSS, you'll know that the workers who made them have the chance to speak up for their rights.

Sheffield, Loughborough and Sussex universities have already announced their affiliation to the WRC. This shows an outstanding commitment to lead the way on human rights. Several others have expressed an intention to do so.

We've also seen a lot of success with fighting for human rights

in electronics and other types of sweatshops. More and more universities are setting up steering groups to push for more ethical purchasing. Students are getting on the committees and making their voices heard.

But that's not the end of it. We need every university in the country to sign up and support workers' rights. We need to fight to make sure that, when abuses by corporations are made clear, the university stops trading with them. We need to get rid of sweatshops for good.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

The people who've brought about this change aren't superhuman activists. They're ordinary students, just like you. The rest of this guide will focus on what they've done and how you can make the same things happen at your university.

GOAL 1. GET OTHERS INSPIRED AND INVOLVED

EXPOSE THE PROBLEM, RAISE AWARENESS AND GET YOUR VOICE HEARD.

PUBLICISE.

Not everybody will know how extensive the problem is. When they know, they're far more likely to help you and get involved. Use leaflets, posters and the People & Planet issue briefings to help promote your message.

BUILD A NETWORK.

There may well be other student and staff groups at the university to help you. Your staff's trade unions, such as the University and College Union (UCU) and Unite can be really helpful and supportive. Related campaigning groups, like Amnesty International, and Student Action for Refugees can help you build up a strong network. You may also be impressed by how supportive your LGBT society, Women's group and religious societies can be. They will help you take action.

USE PETITIONS.

Sometimes, one lone voice is not enough. But backed up by hundreds of signatures, that voice can be incredibly powerful. Petitions are a great way to show powerful people just how much support you have behind you. They're also a great way to build a base of supporters and get e-mails.

STAGE PUBLICITY STUNTS.

Why not mock-up a sweatshop? Perform the brutal conditions of sweatshops for your university. Make the issue impossible to ignore. Or why not go naked? Every year, students all over the country strip off and sport the slogan: "I'd rather go naked than wear sweatshop clothes."

DEMONSTRATE.

Grab some placards and banners, raise your voices and get yourselves down to your university's main offices. Nothing gets the attention of powerful people better than a good ol' demo.



GOAL 2. GET YOUR UNIVERSITY TO JOIN THE WORKER RIGHTS CONSORTIUM

Ruth Fox, a student at Sheffield University, explains how she convinced her institution to sign up to the WRC:



Our campaign to persuade Sheffield University to sign up to the Workers Rights Consortium started small. Last summer, we got in touch with our Students Union President, who was very interested in the idea, and gave him a run-through of what WRC affiliation would involve. He promised to raise the issue at the next University Corporate Social Responsibility Meeting and also suggested that we get in touch with influential staff members. We emailed the Head of Procurement, the Finance Manager, and key academics who we thought might be sympathetic (a bit of research into potential supporters is well-advised).

Initially progress was slow. We ran a long campaign to get our Finance Manger's support. Eventually we caught him leaving a meeting, at which point he informed us that (of course) the University would affiliate!

We received the official announcement soon afterwards. Both Sheffield University AND Sheffield University Students' Union signed up to the Workers Rights Consortium.

Now that Sheffield University has affiliated, a precedent has been set and you can use this to your advantage when taking action on your own university campus. Start small – if you can get a few key staff members on your side, that's a great start. Don't be afraid to be pushy if you get ignored. And above all, remember, persistence pays off!"



GET YOUR UNIVERSITY TO SIGN UP TO THE WORKER RIGHTS CONSORTIUM AND DEFEND THE RIGHTS OF WORKERS IN THE GARMENT INDUSTRY.



Lobby your university to affiliate to the WRC. Find out who's in charge of making the decision, which is usually a procurement manager or finance manager, and make the case to them.

You can send e-mails and letters, run petitions and attend meetings to make clear your position. You might not be able to convince them with one meeting, but keep up the pressure. Tell them how affiliation will improve their standing in the Green League and help their 'brand' by showing students that they care about workers' rights.

The more people you have on your side and the more positive support you can demonstrate, the stronger your case will be. You can already point to Sheffield, Loughborough and Sussex as universities that have made the right decision.

Remember that if the university is hostile or unresponsive, you can step up your game. Protests, publicity stunts and direct action can help you get the goods.

For more information on how to do this, check out the People & Planet lobbying guide or e-mail buyright@peopleandplanet.org

GOAL 3 – GET HUMAN RIGHTS ON THE AGENDA

Get involved in a steering group and guide your university in the right direction.

Universities have lots of decision making groups that steer them on almost every issue (hence the name). The WRC is only focused on garments, but we want to fight for the rights of everyone who makes your computers, stationery and furniture. By joining a steering group, you can make sure that the university considers the human rights implications of everything it buys.

If you don't already have a Fairtrade or procurement steering group, lobby your university to set one up. Where they already exist, make sure students get represented. You should have student representation on every related steering group. These can be one of the best ways to make a lasting difference to how your university is run.



Make use of the Promoting Poverty Aware Procurement on Campus (PPAPC) information sheets. These will advise your university on buying ethically with everything from beauty products to timber, and will be extremely helpful to your steering group. Find them at peopleandplanet.org/buyright/information sheets



GOAL 4 - PASS THE BUY RIGHT POLICY

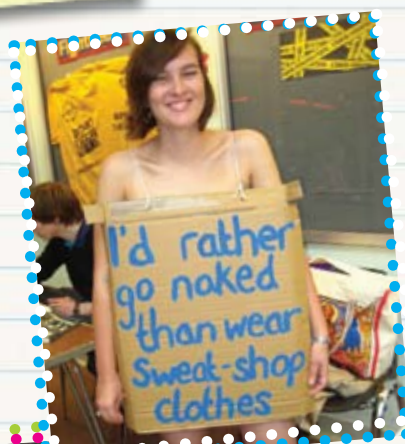
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Get your university to make a long-term commitment to protecting human rights in their supply chains. This means them putting into policy that they make a commitment to continuously improving the human rights conditions in their supply chains. For for information on this see peopleandplanet.org/buyright/policy



"Our university certainly didn't have the best interests of people working in its supply chain at heart. They ignored our letters and refused to take any action when we confronted them with direct evidence of sweatshops in their supply chains. We were forced to step up our campaign.

We got both our students' union and the University and Colleges Union's (UCU) support. We also started taking direct action, including naked protests and a sweatshop sit-in in the Vice Chancellors's office. We went over the procurement manager's head and spoke to his staff.



The university called in the senior managers of their suppliers to talk to us. They are now taking steps to 'improve' their supply chain. But that won't stop us. We won't be fobbed off with anything less than a fully transparent, effective worker-run system for improving working conditions. We won't settle for anything less than the Worker Rights Consortium."



Edd Bauer, student at Birmingham University

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WINNING THE ARGUMENT

Q. "But it'll be too expensive. We're in a recession, don't ya know?"

A. "Ethical procurement is good value." It often doesn't cost any more to switch to a more ethical product. When it does, remember that procurement managers don't have to buy simply the 'cheapest' goods, but the 'best value' ones, and part of that includes social and environmental sustainability.

"Buying socially sustainable products is good for the university's brand." If a supplier is exposed by human rights groups in the future then you may have to switch anyway to protect your university's reputation. Why not do it in advance, when you can prevent the potential damage?

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Q. "Why should we bother with this?"

A. "So that our university doesn't get left behind." More and more pioneering universities are now switching to socially sustainable procurement. Don't let your university be the laggard at sustainable development. Pioneering universities such as Oxford Brookes have used this to their advantage.

A. "To improve our ranking in the Green League" The People & Planet Green League is a high-profile ranking of every UK university by environmental & ethical performance, and now includes a section on socially sustainable procurement. To maintain your position in the

league table you need to join the Worker Rights Consortium and form a steering group.

A. "To demonstrate our values" Universities should promote the value of human rights. Surveys and petitions show that these values are important to procurement staff and students. To stay true to these values we need to protect the human rights of the people who make the products we use.

A. "It's government policy" The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' Sustainable Procurement plan of 2005 and the Department for International Development's 2009 White Paper both say that public procurement should be used to aid sustainable development, including ethical and fair trade.

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Q. "Why the Worker Rights Consortium?"

A. "External monitoring is needed." Voluntary agreements have had little success in ensuring that companies are respecting human rights in their supply chains. By joining the Worker Rights Consortium universities are saying that it's not enough for companies to simply sign a piece of paper and say that they respect human rights: they need to be monitored.

A. "Other bodies lie." Big businesses put lots of money into branding themselves as ethical and setting up fake monitoring bodies to pretend

they're conforming to labour rights standards. In fact, if they spent as much money on acting ethically as they do on pretending to be ethical, we might not have such a huge struggle on our hands. Maritza Vargas, a trade union representative at a factory in the Dominican Republic, says she believes WRC is the only one that tells the truth. Because it focuses on the concerns of workers rather than the testimonies of their bosses, the WRC gives a much more accurate picture of the standards in factories.

A. "They have a good reputation for providing independent, well-resourced monitoring."

Some of the biggest and most prestigious universities in the world have joined up because they are unhappy with the murky practices of the companies that are supplying their garments, and want to challenge corporate practice in one of the world's most exploitative industries. The Worker Rights Consortium is a ground-breaking, independent and not-for-profit organisation with the resources and relationships in place to help universities hold their suppliers to account.

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FIND OUT MORE



These tools will help you get started and continue to build a successful campaign at your university. In this action pack you will find:

10 000 voices for Human Rights Petition

Gathering signatures is one of the easiest ways to demonstrate support for a campaign.

Use this petition to show your Vice Chancellor that students want their university to respect human rights.

Motion Template

This pack contains a model motion that you can pass through your students' union to gain more support for your cause.

A Guide to Lobbying

Once you get started, you'll find out how easy it is to talk to people in positions of power. The lobbying guide will help you identify who those decision makers are and how best to communicate with them. It will show you how to be as influential as possible.

A Guide to Media and Blogging

The press is one of the most powerful tools at our disposal. Corporations and universities respond quickly to damage to their brands. This guide will help you make best use of the media to raise awareness and influence people.

Sweatshops Issue Briefings

These are great introductions for newcomers to explain exactly what's wrong with sweatshops and what students can do about them.

All of these resources are also available online at peopleandplanet.org/buyright/resources

Other resources available online:

Information about affiliation to the WRC, and a model letter of affiliation:
peopleandplanet.org/wrc/membership

The Worker Rights Consortium's FAQ for British universities:
www.workersrights.org/faquk.asp

people & planet is a student campaigning organisation working to end world poverty, defend human rights, and protect the environment. People & Planet's Buy Right campaign aims to support the human rights of workers in university supply chains. It will do this by making university buying power a beacon for sustainable development and a force for human rights.



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