



student action on world poverty and the environment

Proposal for second campaign theme from 2009/10

DEADLINE for ideas Sunday 6 January 2008

<http://peopleandplanet.org/forum/08>

Your details

Please provide the names of People & Planet group members who are putting this proposal forward (there may be up to 4 proposers but there should be at least 2):

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Your proposal for second campaign theme from 2009/10

Total word limit for this section: **1000 words**.

Title	Workers' Rights
Summary of your proposal for The Forum Guide (no more than 200 words).	<p>The focus of the workers' rights campaign theme is what we can do as students to support people fighting against exploitation and labour rights abuses, be that in the global south or here in the UK.</p> <p>From responding to international appeals about workers' rights to working on living wage campaigns with low-paid workers in our own institutions (many of whom are migrant workers and hence our most direct link to the global south), there is a whole host of</p>

valuable activities the People & Planet Network could undertake in this area. We can also learn a lot from United Students Against Sweatshops in the US and their founding of the Workers' Rights Consortium, which works with human rights groups and trade unions in the countries where university merchandise is produced to ensure that it is sweatshop-free.

This campaign theme aims to support workers worldwide by building links with them and their trade unions. In helping to build power amongst the disadvantaged, we are acknowledging that they are active agents of change and not simply potential recipients of external aid. This will help bring about a much-needed change of direction, moving away from a paternalistic attitude to one of grass-roots solidarity.

At the heart of the problem of economic injustice is an inequality of power. Focusing on solidarity in this way, P&P can stay true to its objective of tackling the root causes of poverty and injustice. By coordinating this work in educational institutions across the UK, People & Planet can make a unique contribution in the struggle to end exploitation in the workplace.

What is the proposed campaign theme?

Please see summary above.

Why are you proposing this campaign theme?

1 . . . is a significant human rights, poverty and/or environmental injustice.

Workers' rights are violated across the globe. They earn poverty wages and work excessive hours in dangerous "sweatshop" conditions. Moreover, when workers do organise to demand improved working conditions, they often face abusive treatment and illegal suppression.

2 . . . is raised by those affected or in solidarity with them.

This campaign would be based upon the position espoused by the aboriginal activist Lilla Watson that: "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." This means that solidarity and cooperation with groups in the UK and the global south are the key elements to the campaign - from solidarity work with low-paid workers on our own campuses to responses to international appeals about workers rights violations abroad. We can also learn a lot from United Students Against Sweatshops in the US and their founding of the Workers' Rights Consortium, which works with human rights groups and trade unions in the countries where university merchandise is produced to ensure that it is sweatshop-free.

3 . . . can be tackled by People & Planet as a student network.

Students are part of an international community of workers. The cleaners, caterers and other support staff of our universities and colleges more often than not work long, hard hours and are paid poverty wages (and, increasingly, many are migrant workers). Our university/ college merchandise is manufactured by workers labouring in appalling conditions around the world. At the same time, many students are workers themselves, sometimes exploited by the same companies but at different stages in the supply chain - e.g. stacking shelves in a supermarket or selling clothes on the highstreet. With our interactions and inter-connections with workers around the world, and our position as students, we are very well-placed to show support and solidarity - after all, we need not fear deportation/ dismissal and are not working 80 hours a week to earn enough to live on/ support our families. It is a sad fact that university administrations tend to listen more to student voices than the voices of workers they are complicit in exploiting.

4 . . . could include a variety of campaign goals and targets developed.

There are many exciting options. To list a few examples: becoming a sweat-free university, college or school; institutions joining the Workers' Rights Consortium; institutions partnering workers' organisations abroad; running 'living wage' campaigns on campus; language exchanges with migrant workers; translating literature on labour rights for workers and informing them of potential trade unions; campaigning for an end to under 18s being paid a lower minimum wage for doing the same job; challenging high street retailers; holding corporations to account for their labour rights violations through ethical investment campaigns; lobbying the UK government to place effective regulation on corporations.

5 . . . is meaningful to students across the People & Planet Network, by age, geography, interest experience and skills.

As this campaign would be based in schools, colleges and universities it would be meaningful to students across the People & Planet Network. The potential breadth of the campaign means that it can be easily accessible regardless of interest, experience and skills. Fairtrade would also be a natural starting point for the campaign thus being extremely relevant to the existing focus of many 6th formers and college students.

6 . . . has opportunities for cooperation with other groups, including those in the Global South. Certainly, loads of labour rights groups and trade unions both here and abroad. UK trade unions could provide a much-needed source of funding for P&P. We can also work with United Students Against Sweatshops, and the Workers' Rights Consortium. We can build on the international links that are being developed through the Redress Fashion campaign – for example with the Coalition for Immokalee Workers and the Student-Farmworker Alliance in the US that are taking on the fastfood giants.

7 . . . can be contributed to by People & Planet in a unique way and plays on our strengths as a student network.

Students can have a direct impact on workers' rights campaigning for sweat-free universities/schools and pushing their institutions to ensure that merchandise is manufactured under fair and ethical conditions. Students can also have concrete victories in supporting living wage campaigns for underpaid staff. There is the opportunity for groups to get involved through language exchanges with migrant workers. At the moment these kind of activities are limited to a few areas, especially London, but People & Planet could provide a unique role in taking the campaign nationwide – supporting groups around the country and coordinating efforts, as has been so successful with P&P campaigns such as Go Green. This kind of coordination would be essential for something like the Workers' Rights Consortium to work in the UK.

Those who are keen to work on the global dimension to the campaign more explicitly can focus on corporate abuse and wider trade injustices, drawing on P&P's experiences of campaigning on these areas.

8 . . . has a body of research and resources available to us in order to develop the campaign. Plenty of research from organisations such as Labour behind the Label and War on Want, working on labour rights and corporate responsibility. United Students Against Sweatshops has a brilliant store of online resources.

9 . . . fits in with and draws from current and past People & Planet's campaigns.

This campaign fits in with and draws on the current Fairtrade and Redress Fashion campaigns as well as past campaigns such as the 'Pepsi out of Burma' campaign and the network-led Ethical Investment campaign. It would keep a connection between the university network and schools/colleges network, as school and college groups are going to continue running Fairtrade campaigns regardless of what the Forum decides. However, importantly, this campaign would allow students' campaigning to be a journey starting with Fairtrade in school/college and progressing to a more holistic approach to workers' rights and the kind of campaigning needed to defend them, at home and abroad.

If you need any help or advice relating to completing this form please contact your support office contact or Joe in the Forum team joe.greenwood@peopleandplanet.org or call 01865 245678

When completed, please return by email to forum@peopleandplanet.org