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## Topshop speaker withdraws after Oxford People & Planet pressure

Student campaigners from Oxford University People & Planet have expressed their disappointment at high street fashion store Topshop's last minute pullout from a debate on Fairtrade and the fashion industry at Oxford University.

Topshop representatives had been due to join a panel on Wednesday evening in Magdalen College hosted by the Oxford University Fairtrade Coalition and student networking organization OxHub, billed as "Fashionably Fair". The panel chairperson, however, announced at the beginning of the discussion that Topshop had contacted the organisers just four hours before the event was to begin to announce that they would no longer be participating in the debate, in response to Oxford University People & Planet's campaign targeting Topshop's exploitation of workers and use of sweatshops in their factories across the developing world.

Oxford University People & Planet campaigner and first-year student Ruth Simister said after the event:

*"We are profoundly disappointed that Topshop felt that they were unable to come to Oxford to speak on their commitment to Fairtrade and defend their manufacturing processes.*

*"Topshop's high-profile advertising for its Fairtrade range is trying to hide the fact that the vast majority of its products come from sweatshops and have been produced under horrific working conditions which have been described as 'slave labour'. Tonight's no-show only demonstrates the thinness of their commitment to Fairtrade and the indefensible dishonesty of their assurances to consumers about the conditions that their clothes have been made under."*

Oxford University People & Planet have held two demonstrations since December 2007 outside the Oxford branch of Topshop on Queen Street, urging consumers and passers-by to demand that Topshop 'clean up its supply chain' and make a basic commitment to ethical trade by joining the Ethical Trading Initiative.

Graduate student and Oxford University People & Planet spokesperson Nick Chan added:

*"We had been looking forward to questioning Topshop's brazen hypocrisy whereby their Fairtrade and sweatshop-made clothes hang on the same rack.*

*"That they are not even willing to appear in public and engage in a dialogue about their manufacturing practices echoes their refusal to take even the first and most basic step towards a more ethical fashion industry by joining the Ethical Trading Initiative."*

**ENDS**

## Notes

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Oxford University People & Planet is part of the national student campaign network People & Planet. The Redress Fashion campaign has been running since November 2007 and calls for the Arcadia Group, which owns Topshop, Dorothy Perkins, Miss Selfridges and a number of other brands, to join the Ethical Trading Initiative. For more information, see <http://peopleandplanet.org/redressfashion>.

Pictures from the last OU P&P action outside the Oxford branch of Topshop on 26 Jan 2008 are available upon request. Further actions are being planned for later in the year

In December 2007, students in 15 cities and towns across the UK, including Oxford, held a national day of action against Topshop, and Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for International Development Gareth Thomas MP singled out and criticised the Arcadia group for its refusal to join the Ethical Trading Initiative. See <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/green-attacked-for-shunning-ethical-trade-group-763222.html> and <http://peopleandplanet.org/navid5214>.

The Ethical Trading Initiative is an organisation of corporations, trade unions and campaigners working toward implementing and improving codes of conduct in corporation supply chain practices. Topshop is the biggest high street retailer not to join the ETI. For more information see <http://www.ethicaltrade.org/>

The Arcadia Group runs over two thousand UK high street fashion stores and is owned by billionaire Sir Philip Green, who paid himself a \$1.2bn share dividend in 2005, enough to double the wages of the entire Cambodian garment workforce for eight years.

On 12 August 2007, the Sunday Times published a report from an investigation highlighting Topshop's use of sweatshops, 40p per hour pay for its workers and 70-hour working weeks. See "Revealed: Topshop clothes made with 'slave labour'", available online at [http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life\\_and\\_style/women/fashion/article2241665.ece](http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/women/fashion/article2241665.ece)