



ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FOUNDATION
PROTECTING PEOPLE AND PLANET



student action on world poverty and the environment

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Mr Arthur Ryan
Chairman
PRIMARK
Primark House,
21 West Street
Reading
RG1 1TT

Dear Mr Ryan,

This week is the start of Fairtrade Fortnight which celebrates the achievements of the Fairtrade movement throughout the UK. While excellent progress has been made in some sectors, fair trading practices and the guarantee of basic rights should be a corporate norm, not an exception. Unfortunately in the fashion industry there is clear evidence that many basic principles of fair trade have not been embraced by major retailers.

That is why *People & Planet*, the UK's largest student campaign organisation, *Labour Behind the Label*, a campaign that supports garment workers' worldwide, and the *Environmental Justice Foundation*, an environmental and human rights NGO that is running an international cotton campaign asking people to "Pick Your Cotton Carefully", have joined together to urge PRIMARK to clean up its trading practices. We write to you today to ask you to provide clear evidence that Primark can ensure that the products it sells will be produced in ways which do not damage the environment, do not use forced child labour, and can ensure that workers and producers at every stage of production have their basic rights respected, including the right to a living wage.

During Fairtrade Fortnight, People & Planet groups across the country are planning to draw the attention of the public to our concerns and encourage consumers to consider how their clothes have been produced, ask questions about your purchasing practices, and demand an assurance that basic rights are not being violated and that children have not been forced to labour. We are not encouraging a boycott of PRIMARK, or action that is illegal or disruptive.

We recognise that inadequate labour standards and a lack of transparency are not unique to PRIMARK's supply chain. But we have chosen to target PRIMARK because of its influence on UK retail practices, in particular its power in driving down prices and fuelling demand for 'fast fashion'. These factors have been widely documented as having a negative effect on standards throughout the clothing supply chain (for example, in Oxfam's 2004 report *Trading Away our Rights, Women working in global supply chains*, and Labour behind the Label's 2006 Report *Who pays for cheap clothes? 5 questions the low-cost retailers must answer*) and are, we believe, in conflict with PRIMARK's commitments under the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI).

Retailers have the power to be a force for good in establishing and upholding ethical and responsible business practices. To exercise this power, PRIMARK must make respect for labour rights an integral part of its product sourcing strategy. The responsibility for meeting basic labour and environmental standards cannot simply be passed down the supply chain.

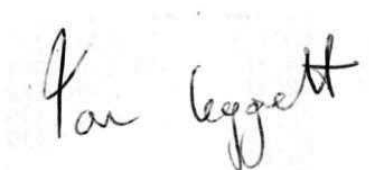
A responsible product sourcing policy requires you to work in close partnership with your suppliers to help them meet agreed standards, and to improve environmental and working conditions. An essential factor here is forming long term relationships which provide security and an incentive to improve conditions, and ensuring your purchasing practices aid, rather than undermine, such efforts. Newton Responsible Investment said in November 2005 *“Key to Primark’s business model is the sourcing of products from the cheapest possible supplier. Primark has used hundreds of suppliers located across the world. Relationships with suppliers can be short and variable, sometimes even changing mid-season”*. Codes of conduct are of little value when PRIMARK’s purchasing practices undermine the very labour standards it claims to support. Instead of driving a race to the bottom, we urge PRIMARK to become a leader in best practice.

There also needs to be much greater transparency in PRIMARK’s whole supply chain. If consumers are to make an informed choice about the products they purchase they are entitled to know that agreed standards have been met at all stages of the production process. At present this information is not available and leaves a stain of doubt on the products PRIMARK sells. For example, the Environmental Justice Foundation finds that tens of thousands of children are forced to work in cotton fields in Uzbekistan, a significant source of cotton to the EU. Similarly, a recent investigation into the use of chemicals shows the widespread use of highly toxic agents which represent a serious health hazard to workers and surrounding communities. PRIMARK is open to criticism on the use of forced labour and environmental degradation because there is insufficient information about the conditions under which clothes sold at PRIMARK are produced.

In summary, we ask you to ensure that:

- Workers and producers at every stage of production have their basic rights respected, including the right to a living wage
- no forced child labour was used at any stage of production
- producers, workers and the surrounding communities are not put at risk through environmental destruction or the use of poisonous pesticides

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ian Leggett". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Ian Leggett
Director, People & Planet