

**FIRST PUBLIC DECLARATION OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL UNION LEAGUE FOR BRAND RESPONSIBILITY  
- FEBRUARY 10, 2013 -**

To workers around the world who, like us, produce goods for multinational corporations:

We are all too familiar with daily exploitation and suffering. Our hands create great wealth, but for our families and our countries there are only crumbs. Ever since the masters of production began to outsource their operations, hiding themselves from any responsibility to the workers and their communities, our standard of living has declined.

In an endless chain of subsidiaries, contractors and subcontractors, we are made invisible to consumers and to those who profit from their purchases. They do not see our hands, tired and injured. They do not see the hungry faces of our sons and daughters. They are not there when a worker faints or suffers a miscarriage as a result of long hours, heat, and malnutrition. They do not see the bodies of our fellow workers, burnt, beaten or assassinated. They only see a logo and, in fine print, "Made In" an unknown country.

In Bangladesh workers die in one fatal fire after another in the factories that produce for the multinational brands; in China our brothers and sisters jumped to their death to escape psychological torment at the factory where they built electronics for the most highly valued brand in the world; brave comrades like Aminul Islam are beaten, tortured and assassinated for defending our rights. For all this we are calling on you to unite in international action to put an end to this tragic era of extreme globalized exploitation.

We are not the first to denounce this painful reality, but we are the ones who will not allow it to continue. We say, enough! It is time for us to rise up.

Experience has taught us that, although those who directly own and manage our workplaces share in responsibility for the serious problems facing workers in the export industry, it is **THE MULTINATIONAL BRANDS that have the greatest responsibility. It is the brands that design, control and profit from the decentralized global manufacturing model.** The brands are the true owners, the true bosses, and the true exploiters of our labor.

Far from the promises of employment and development offered to our governments, the multinational brands have left a mark of pain, suffering, occupational injuries, lack of education and, above all, a degrading poverty in free trade zones all over the world. The brands use this model of decentralized global production to make factories compete with each other to see who can make a product the cheapest, forcing our bosses to continually reduce labor costs, impacting our wages and our health and safety. They have created a model in which they never dirty their hands nor touch a machine but keep for themselves the vast majority of the industry's profits. This sweatshop system -- for that is what it is -- has allowed the brands to amass multi-billion dollar fortunes while we continue to live in poverty.

We speak to you as union organizations that, for years, have faced a multitude of abuses affecting millions of workers in manufacturing centers known as "maquiladoras", "free trade zones" or "export processing zones." All over the world, the working conditions in

these centers share common characteristics: low wages that keep us in poverty, unsuitable working conditions that threaten our lives and health, and the lack of respect for our rights to union representation. We have suffered physical mistreatment, sexual harassment, factory closures without payment of legally owed severance, lack of access to health care or pension systems, and much more. When we have organized to change this situation, we have encountered every possible anti-union repressive measure, including discrimination, surveillance and harassment, individual and mass firings, threats and physical violence, including torture and assassination of our leaders.

**But make no mistake, we are not complaining for the sake of complaining,** we have united to declare that, in spite of all of these difficulties and with a great deal of struggle and sacrifice, we have succeeded in forming trade unions. Our union organizations tenaciously struggle, day after day, in our countries' factories and industrial parks; we teach our coworkers about our rights, we negotiate collective bargaining agreements, we advocate and demand respect for the rights of our members and coworkers as they face all kinds of abuses. We engage with governments and courts, we demand respect for workers' rights under national law and international conventions, we create international alliances that bring our voices to the consumers of the products we make.

We know from our experience that there is a solution to the abuses we face: The multinational brands are our true bosses and we must make them take responsibility for the conditions in our factories.

The brands decide if we have jobs or not by moving their orders around constantly; they must guarantee stable orders. The brands control our wages and determine our unreachable production quotas by setting the prices they demand of their suppliers; they must pay a fair price and guarantee a living wage. The brands look the other way when deadly dangers persist in our workplaces; the brands must provide the funds to make our factories safe.

We have tried every avenue to improve our working conditions. We report violations of our laws to our governments; but they are so afraid of losing investment that they refuse to uphold their responsibilities. We form unions in spite of the anti-union repression and we negotiate with our local employers; but they repeatedly insist that the brands will not pay enough to meet our demands and threaten us that the brands will pull their orders if we continue to demand our rights.

We have asked the brands to intervene and have reported to them the on-going violations of their "codes of conduct;" but they only make excuses and explicitly reject their responsibility to remedy the violations. We have forced them to resolve isolated cases; but they withdraw or reduce their orders and move on to another more exploitative supplier, provoking mass firings or closures, sending an ominous message to those who would dare to defend their rights. We have participated in innumerable dialogues and signed many agreements and protocols; but the agreements and protocols are not enforceable, and they produce no concrete results. We have seen no fundamental change from the many "corporate social responsibility" initiatives or from brand-initiated monitoring.

The multinational brands use their power to control our direct employers, our governments and our working conditions. Why should we not use our power to force them

to sit down face to face with us to negotiate serious solutions to these matters of life or death, dignity or misery?

When we have tried to struggle alone, as separate organizations, without uniting across the brands' supply chains, the brands have laughed at us from their offices and watched us like chess pieces on their computer screens. Only when we unite our forces can we build the power we need to face the powerful multinationals.

We believe that international union action -- *Labor Internationalism* -- is the only effective means of confronting the serious problems we face. We must strive for justice in the entire international supply chain of the export industry -- and to do that we must unite our organizations and our brother and sister workers across the decentralized global supply chain.

**All the major brands have adopted this production model, and all are responsible for the many violations and injustices we have described. However, in recent years, ADIDAS has stood out as a brand responsible for an inordinate number of labor violations.** ADIDAS has spread its supply chain across more than 1,200 factories, many more than any of its competitors. These ADIDAS suppliers around the world have repeatedly and systematically abused us and violated our rights, more than any other brand. This has been confirmed by statistics provided by the corporate-funded Fair Labor Association (FLA), of which ADIDAS is a dues-paying member: **ADIDAS has the highest per-factory average of freedom of association violations and the highest number of factory violations**, more than any other brand reviewed by the FLA in the entire world.

**We must change the rules of this industry... Now!** We demand a negotiation in order to improve working conditions—a negotiation from the bottom up, with the organizations that legitimately and directly represent worker interests. We demand a negotiation between our workplace unions and the industry's highest executives, the true owners of the production system and those who degrade our working conditions in order to increase their profits—**with brands like ADIDAS.**

We, the unions that legitimately represent workers in the export industry around the world, have united to form the ***INTERNATIONAL UNION LEAGUE FOR BRAND RESPONSIBILITY.*** ***We demand that ADIDAS immediately enter into face-to-face negotiations with representatives from our unions that have united in THE LEAGUE, unions that truly represent the workers who sew ADIDAS sportswear and make ADIDAS shoes!***

To the kindred organizations of the world -- labor unions, student organizations, human rights groups, labor academics, activists for consumer and labor rights -- we ask for your support in our call to the brands, and specifically for **our demand that ADIDAS recognize its responsibility for our working conditions and begin negotiations to improve those conditions. WE DEMAND SECURE JOBS, SAFE WORKPLACES AND LIVING WAGES!**

We call on workers around the world who expend their lives laboring for multinational brands: let us unite in one voice demanding and taking action to eliminate the injustices of the export industry.

**Sweatshop and free trade zone workers: get organized in unions that truly represent  
your interests! Fight together with us in  
THE INTERNATIONAL UNION LEAGUE FOR BRAND RESPONSIBILITY!!**

Coordination Committee

*For a current list of unions affiliated with the League, see [www.union-league.org](http://www.union-league.org)*