



Press Release: Killer Practice Still Not Banned By All Jeans Brands

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Amsterdam, 15 February 2011 – The sandblasting of jeans has still not been banned by all jeans producers, even though the practice is known to kill sandblasting operators. Ignoring repeated calls by trade unions, labor-rights organizations and medical associations, large international fashion brands like Diesel, Dolce & Gabbana and Replay have refused to enter into dialogue to bring the deadly practice to an end in their supply chains.

Jeans are sandblasted to give parts of the fabric a faded, worn out or bleached look. These jeans are profitable business: the retail prices of sandblasted jeans is often significantly higher than jeans without such finishing. Therefore, jeans producers think they found a cheap way of increasing their profits. However, there is a hidden cost: sandblasting operators working in the countries where most of our clothes are manufactured - such as Bangladesh, China, Mexico, Pakistan, and Egypt - contract an acute form of silicosis. In Turkey alone, 46 known cases of former sandblasting operators who died because of sandblasting-related silicosis were registered. According to the organizations, in reality the number could be far higher than the registered cases.

The current organisation of garment production through long international supply chains, often based in countries where basic Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) procedures are routinely violated, makes it impossible for jeans producers to guarantee the highly complicated and technically advanced safety procedures necessary to sandblast jeans in a safe way.

Last year, jeans producer Levi-Strauss, fashion giant Hennes & Mauritz (H&M), retailer C&A and many others announced they will ban sandblasted jeans from their product ranges. "Industry leaders show that it can be done, so there are no excuses," said Wyger Wentholt of the Clean Clothes Campaign. "It are typically laggard companies that have very conservative ideas about corporate responsibility that are also failing to engage in this case, even if the lives of thousands of workers are at risk."

The Clean Clothes Campaign and its allies demand from jeans producers who still sell sandblasted jeans to start phasing out production with immediate effect. "We also call upon consumers to tell brands they don't want to buy killer jeans," added Mr. Wentholt.

In Turkey, where the practice was legally banned in 2009, activists demand aftercare for the know victims, and have started court cases. "We want these brands to take up responsibility for the damage done, and ensure that proper medical care and compensations are given to the victims of jeans sandblasting," added Ms. Yesim Yasin of the Turkish Solidarity Committee of Sandblasting Laborers. "The government should also take responsibility for abetting this on a large scale. They should provide state disability pensions for the known cases, and not just repeat empty promises as they do now."



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The same goes for the jeans companies, said Mr. Wentholt of the CCC. "We urge them to formulate clear policies about medical care and compensations for the victims as soon as possible. We are also seeking the companies' support in pushing for legislation to ban the importation of sandblasted textiles from outside the EU. It is ridiculous that we forbid unsafe sandblasting in Europe and still see massive amounts of killer jeans in the shops."