



'Bleaching' denim blackens workers' lungs, Turkish federation chief says

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When denim is lightened through the sandblasting process, people's lives are darkened, Ali Çetin, the general director of the Federation of Consumer Associations, or TÜDEF, has said at a press conference in Ankara.

The event was held to support denim workers with the lung disease silicosis who work without health and employment insurance at companies subcontracted by major denim brand companies, the Anatolia news agency reported Thursday.

"The lungs of denim sandblasting workers die away from the denims that are worn by our sons and daughters," Çetin said, calling for a boycott of jeans that are produced in inhumane working conditions.

Workers in the denim sandblasting sector have gathered in Ankara and will stay there for three days to make their voices heard by the government and relevant public authorities as well as raise awareness about those who have contracted silicosis from their work. Workers who pressure-spray sand onto jeans to soften and "age" the fabric can inhale dangerous particles that cause the lung disease.

Saying the only thing workers are asking for is to receive treatment for the disease, Çetin also called on consumers to be aware of the conditions in which products were being produced before buying them. He said TÜDEF would continue its awareness campaign to encourage people not to buy sandblasted denim, which has taken, and continue to takes, the lives of hundreds of workers.

He also said he would bring the case to the world's federation of consumers associations, Consumers International, and asked for an exemption from court fees for mistreated workers who have brought their cases to court.

Abdülhalim Demir, a member of the Committee to Support Denim Sandblasting Workers, said in his speech that they met with members of Parliament from both the ruling and opposition parties to demand that all workers with silicosis benefit from social security, whether they have insurance or not.

Demir said they had been promised a new draft law regarding the workers' health conditions and insurance, which will be presented to Parliament in October. He also said the group would return to Ankara in October and continue its protests until the law is approved.