



CONTACT: Connie Connors, +1.212.219.9188,
(m) +1.917.287.1710, connie@connors.com,
Skype: connie.connors4

Unprecedented Number of U.S. and European Apparel Companies and Major Industry Association Sign Pledge to Call for Elimination of Forced Child Labor in Uzbekistan

New York City – Sept. 12, 2011 -- More than 60 of the world's best known apparel companies and brands as well as the American Apparel and Footwear Association (AAFA), which represents more than 800 brands, have signed a pledge to not knowingly source Uzbek cotton harvested using forced child labor. The companies will maintain this pledge until the elimination of this practice is independently verified by the International Labour Organization (ILO). The pledge is being coordinated by the Responsible Sourcing Network (www.sourcingnetwork.org).

Company signatories include:

adidas Group (adidas, Reebok, Taylor-Made, adidas Golf); **ANN INC.** (Ann Taylor, LOFT); **Brooks Sports, Inc.**; **Burberry**; **C&A**; **Carrefour**; **Carter's** (Carter's, OshKosh B'gosh); **Columbia Sportswear Company**; **Eddie Bauer LLC**; **EILEEN FISHER**; **Gap Inc.**; **H & M Hennes & Mauritz AB**; **J.Crew**; **Kohl's Department Stores, Inc.**; **Levi Strauss & Co.**; **Li & Fung Trading**; **Liz Claiborne Inc.**; **Macy's Inc.**; **New Balance**; **Nordstrom Product Group**; **Peacocks Stores Ltd** (Peacocks London, Pearl Lowe for Peacocks, By Design); **PPR Group** (Gucci, Bottega Veneta, Yves Saint Laurent, Balenciaga, Stella McCartney, Alexander McQueen, PUMA, Volcom, Redcats); **PVH Corp.**; **Target Corporation**; **The TJX Companies, Inc.**; **The Jones Group**; **VF Corporation**; **Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.** (ASDA, Better Homes & Gardens Canopy, Faded Glory, George, Home Trends, Mainstays, No Boundaries, Puritan, Sam's Club, White Stag, Your Zone); **The Walt Disney Company**.

Upwards of two million children in Uzbekistan, some as young as seven years old, are forced to leave school by their own government to labor in the cotton fields for two to three months each year. These children face ten-hour work days, exposure to harmful pesticides, and risk physical harm or expulsion from school if they fail to pick a quota of up to 50 pounds of raw cotton per day.

"I commend these companies for making this public commitment and sending a message about sourcing all aspects of their products ethically," stated Patricia Jurewicz, director of Responsible Sourcing Network. "It's not just about Uzbekistan. Consumers want to know what goes into their everyday goods, and have the assurance that people, especially children, are not harmed or exploited in the process."

The signatories signed a public pledge to demonstrate their unwavering commitment to persuade the Uzbek government to end the use of forced child labor in cotton harvesting. This initiative, uniting an unprecedented number of American and European apparel powerhouses, luxury brands and consumer favorites, builds off of efforts by a number of different advocacy organizations that began in Europe in 2004 in response to a call to action by Uzbek human rights groups.

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[Responsible Sourcing Network](http://www.sourcingnetwork.org) (www.sourcingnetwork.org) is a project of the non-profit organization [As You Sow](http://www.asyousow.org) (www.asyousow.org). RSN addresses human rights violations and environmental destruction in the supply chains of consumer products at the raw commodity level. RSN supports network participants in leveraging their influence to achieve significant and measurable solutions in the areas of conflict minerals and child slave labor.

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Pledge text:

We, the undersigned companies are working to ensure that forced child labor does not find its way into our products. We are aware of reports documenting the systemic use of forced child labor in the harvest of cotton in Uzbekistan. We are collaborating with a multi-stakeholder coalition to raise awareness of this very serious concern, and press for its elimination.

As a signatory to this pledge, we are stating our firm opposition to the use of forced child labor in the harvest of Uzbek cotton. We commit to not knowingly source Uzbek cotton for the manufacturing of any of our products until the Government of Uzbekistan ends the practice of forced child labor in its cotton sector. Until the elimination of this practice is independently verified by the International Labor Organization, we will maintain this pledge.

References:

<http://www.cottoncampaign.org/>

http://www.ejfoundation.org/pdf/white_gold_the_true_cost_of_cotton.pdf

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/ccac/events/cotton-sector-in-central-asia-2005/file49842.pdf>

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/164458.pdf>

<http://uzbekgermanforum.org/>