

PRESS RELEASE

Brussels, 23 April 2020

Coronavirus strengthens case for new EU textile laws – 65 civil society groups publish joint vision

As the European Commission is poised to start developing a new ‘comprehensive strategy for textiles’ in the coming months¹, today a group of 65 diverse civil society organisations has set out its vision² for the global Textile, Garments, Leather and Footwear (TGLF) sector. They have done so by releasing a non-official (or “shadow”) strategy in which they propose a set of legislative and non-legislative actions that the EU can undertake to contribute to fairer and more sustainable TGLF value chains.

The group – a broad coalition³ of campaigners for fair trade, human and workers’ rights, environmental protection, and transparency – is calling on the European Commission, MEPs, and EU governments to back an ambitious strategy that will kick-start a global re-design of the textile industry’s broken business model for the post-coronavirus world.

The TGLF sector has long been characterised by labour rights and human rights abuses along with the immense pressure it exerts on our environment and climate.

Members of the European Parliament Delara Burkhardt (S&D), Heidi Hautala (Chair of the Responsible Business Conduct Working Group, from Greens/EFA), and Helmut Scholz (GUE/NGL) have addressed a joint letter to all the Members of the European Parliament to share and support the ‘Civil Society Shadow Strategy’. In the letter, the MEPs stress that “the textile sector has been among the most vulnerable to the COVID-19 crisis due to the power imbalances among its actors and its severe structural problems, including the environmental damage it causes and governance issues. It is one of the most polluting industries, the source of countless catastrophes like that of Rana Plaza, and a hotspot for human rights abuses - which affect women disproportionately”.

Representing the coalition, **Sergi Corbalán, executive director of the Fair Trade Advocacy Office** said: “Voluntary industry action has failed to bring about a fair and sustainable textile industry, so it’s time for EU leaders to reset the industry’s structure” and added “This ‘Shadow Strategy’ offers the Commission the combined expertise of 65 Civil Society Organisations who have years of experience in dealing with the various impacts of the sector. It’s not a menu from which the Commission can pick specific initiatives and leave others behind, but a comprehensive strategy in which taking action in each field reinforces the efforts put into others”.

¹ The Commission’s commitment to a ‘comprehensive Textile Strategy’ was made in the [Circular Economy Action Plan](#) (page 13) published in March 2020. EU Environment ministers will have their say when they react to the Action Plan at the next Environment Council meeting on 22 June. The European Parliament will also react at a forthcoming plenary session. It is expected that the Commission will publish a roadmap towards the Textile Strategy before the end of 2020.

² Full text of the strategy: <http://bit.ly/TextilesEU>

³ See list below

The civil society vision for a comprehensive EU Textile Strategy contains recommendations including:

- Ensure companies are legally obligated to take responsibility for not only their own activities but their whole supply chain by applying an **EU due diligence law** across all sectors, including specific requirements for the TGLF sector. Signing a multi-stakeholder partnership should not exempt business from responsibility.
- **Stricter environmental rules** that cover how textile products sold in the EU are designed and produced, legal and financial responsibility on producers for when their products become waste, as well as meaningful measures to promote transparency.
- Ensuring brands and retailers are legally obliged to honour contracts and **end the culture of unfair purchasing practices** that gives them impunity to cancel orders without honouring payments - leaving workers without pay and a wasteful pile up of unsellable products.
- Make **governance reforms and better law enforcement in producing countries** part of the solution to sustainability issues faced in the TGLF value chains.
- Through **trade policy**, use EU market power to leverage sustainable production practices in the TGLF industry.

ENDS

Note for editors

Full text of the strategy in: <http://bit.ly/TextilesEU>

The Civil Society Shadow European Strategy for Sustainable Textile, Garments, Leather and Footwear is a joint initiative of:

Abiti Puliti, achACT, Aeress, Association 4D, Circular Economy - VšĮ "Žiedinė ekonomika, Clean Clothes Campaign Europe, Clean Clothes Campaign international, , Cooperativa Sociale Insieme, Confederação Portuguesa das Associações de Defesa do Ambiente (CPADA), ECOS, EEB, Emmaus- Europe, ENS, Europe and We, FAIR, Fairtrade Germany, Fairtrade International, Fairtrade Max Havelaar France, Fairtrade Foundation, Fairtrade Polska, Fashion Revolution, FEMNET e.V., FOCSIV, Forum Fairer Handel, France Nature Environnement, Frauenwerk der Nordkirche, Friends of the Earth Europe, FTAO, Gender Alliance for Development Centre (GADC), Humusz Szövetség, INKOTA-Netzwerk, Institute for Sustainable Development Foundation, Institute of Circular Economy, Irish Environmental Network, Lithuanian NGDO Platform, Network Bewust Varbruikein, ÖKOBÜRO, OXFAM Intermón, Oxfam MdM, Plastic Soup Foundation, Plataforma Portuguesa das ONGD, Polish Zero Waste Association, Pravicna-Trgovina, RepaNet, Rreuse, SDG Watch Austria, Sredina – Association of Citizens, SÜDWIND-Institut, The Circle, Traidcraft Exchange, Transparency Germany, Transparency International Deutschland, Umweltdachverband, VerbraucherService Bundesverband , Voice Ireland, Weltladen-Dachverband, Women Engage for a Common Future, Women Engaged for a Common Future France, Wontanara o.p.s., World Fair Trade Organization- Europe, World Fair Trade Organization, World Vision Ireland, World Vision Romania, Wird, Zaiā brīvība (Green Liberty), Zero Waste Europe, and Zero Waste France.

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