



ethical
trading
initiative

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Ethical buying – five top tips for fashion buyers

At a conference in London packed with retailers, brands, campaigners, trade unions and labour standards initiatives chaired by Dan Rees of the Ethical Trading Initiative, broad consensus was reached on five key ways that fashion retailers can make sure their buying decisions are ethical and help improve the conditions of workers in global supply chains:

ETI's five top tips for buying ethically:

- **Know your suppliers** – cut out the middle man and where possible, develop long-term, direct relationships with your suppliers. This will help you build the trust and leverage you need to help make sustained improvements to workers' conditions.
- **Incentivise your suppliers.** Make sure compliance with labour standards is built into your contracts with your suppliers, so they know you mean business. Reward them for their efforts with repeat orders.
- **Get your buyers to 'think worker'.** Educate your buyers about the impact of their decisions on workers, and make sure they include ethical criteria alongside cost and quality when selecting suppliers.
- **Improve production planning.** Deciding to change an entire line of t-shirts from pink to blue when production has already started can mean workers are forced to work excessive hours in their efforts to complete orders on time. Give suppliers clear and predictable lead times, making it easier for them to ensure their employees work predictable and reasonable hours.
- **Look at the price you pay your suppliers.** At the very least, make sure that it allows your suppliers to pay their workers a wage that they can afford to live on.

At the meeting, companies including Gap Inc. and New Look outlined how they are starting to integrate ethical trade into their buying practices.

Said Dan Rees "it is critically important that companies start to integrate ethical criteria into buying practices. It's good to see companies starting to tackle the major challenges involved, and to talk more openly about their experiences. Let's have more of it".

The conference was held while London Fashion Week in full swing to keep ethical trading on the agenda while fashion retailers consider next season's garments.

The International Development minister Gareth Thomas this week called on the fashion industry to "raise its game and ensure that suppliers pay a living wage to its workers," adding: "There is a lack of information for consumers who want to know where products are sourced from.

"This demand for information is not being met," he said. However, he added that although retailers and the UK Government have a part to play in applying pressure, it is governments in developing countries that need to drive through regulation, such as the minimum wage and safety standards.

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Media enquiries

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Notes to editors:

1. The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) is a labour standards initiative. It was established in 1998 to improve the lives of workers and their families in global supply chains. It

believes that companies producing, supplying and selling goods for consumer markets should observe national and international labour laws. Its purpose is to identify and promote responsible corporate practice that will help make this a reality.

2. The conference, "Positive buying: confronting the challenge between buying practices and workers' rights," was hosted by the Multi-Fibre Arrangement Forum. Brands, civil society representatives and manufacturers debated the ethical challenges faced by the high street fashion industry and put forward practical solutions.
3. The Multifibre Arrangement Forum (mfa-forum.net) is an open network of companies, trade unions, non-governmental organisations and international institutions working to mitigate the impact of the end of textile and garment quotas on workers. The Forum is currently working in Bangladesh and Lesotho and is working in Morocco through the ILO decent Work Programme. In addition, the Forum has a working group on issues in the Americas and two working groups looking at the critical issues facing the sector during transitions: responsible closure and responsible buying practices.