



PRESS RELEASE

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High street fashion: the ethical dilemma *Live debate during London Fashion Week*

While buying teams at top fashion retailers hurry to translate new 'looks' showcased at London Fashion Week into affordable high street clothes in record-breaking time, the teams responsible for ethical trading face a different challenge; making sure the workers who make the clothes don't pay the price.

Senior managers at companies including Gap Inc., H&M, Tesco and Asda George join, among others, Social Accountability International, Oxfam International and the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation during London Fashion Week to discuss how to marry consumer demand for the latest trends at the lowest price with the need for companies to help protect the rights of workers in countries like Bangladesh, where up to 20 million people depend directly or indirectly on the garment sector for their livelihood.

Bangladesh is one of the cheapest countries in the world to produce clothing, but rising inflation and increased competition from exporting giants China and India has put extra pressure on already hard-pressed suppliers and factory owners.

At a public event '**Positive buying: confronting the challenge between buying practices and workers' rights**', hosted by the Multi-Fibre Arrangement Forum, brands, civil society representatives and manufacturers debate the ethical challenges faced by the high street fashion industry. The debate will be chaired by Dan Rees, Director of the **Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI)**.

Says Rees, "ETI members' ethical trade activities are starting to make a difference to workers around the world, but what's urgently needed now is for companies across the board to take a much more strategic approach, joining the dots between the ethical trade teams and the buying teams, so that workers don't pay the price for our demand for fashion."

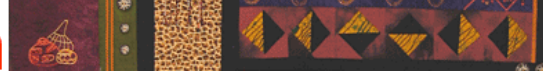
Dan Henkle, Senior Vice President of Social Responsibility of ETI member company Gap. Inc will speak at the event. He says, "We've been taking a close look at our own practices to understand how we can make better decisions as a company. The more we learn, the more we believe that good business and good working conditions are linked – and we're constantly searching for new and innovative ways to improve in both areas."

Says Maggie Burns of the MFA Forum, "the way all brands and retailers purchase product should be integral to their ethical trade agenda. This meeting is an opportunity to participate in this critical debate and to hear from some of the leaders in the field about what's happening in the textile and garment industry."

Speakers at the event on 19 September include Dan Henkle, SVP of Social Responsibility at Gap INC., Osama Taseer, Director at Tiffany's Wear Limited, garments supplier, and Jeremy Hobbs, Executive Director at Oxfam International.

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The MFA Forum



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Notes to editors:

1. The [MFA Forum](#) 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.

2. [AccountAbility](#) is the international non-profit, [membership](#) organisation established in 1995 to promote accountability innovations for sustainable development. AccountAbility serves as the Secretariat for the MFA Forum. Further details about AccountAbility are available at www.accountability21.net

3. The Ethical Trading Initiative 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. Find out more at www.ethicaltrade.org