

**ETI statement in response to Panorama 'Primark on the rack'
(BBC1, 9pm, 23 June 2008)**



24 June 08

Yesterday's Panorama programme was an urgent reminder to all of the often harsh reality of life for the millions of people employed around the world to make clothes for the UK high street.

The allegations raised about Primark were serious, and raise important questions for all retailers about their responsibilities towards the workers who make their products.

The first issue is about how retailers should respond to evidence of child labour in their supply chain. Clearly, child labour is absolutely unacceptable and if a company discovers children making their products, they should take swift action to secure their urgent transition from work into good quality education. There are many challenges involved in this, particularly if local educational provision is inadequate or unaffordable. Complete resolution of the issue can take several months or even years.

The second issue concerns the complexity of retailers' supply chains. As the Panorama programme highlighted, all companies must become more effective at monitoring conditions further down the supply chain, and at controlling their suppliers' use of subcontractors, where workers are more vulnerable and where labour abuses, including the use of child labour, are more likely to occur.

The third is about when to cease trading with suppliers when violations of workers' rights are found. The approach to follow is that of 'continuous improvement'. Retailers should cease trading with their suppliers only as a last resort, after all other options have been exhausted and the retailer is convinced that its commercial leverage will not drive improvement for the workers.

Finally, the article highlights the importance for all companies across the board to do much more to integrate their ethical trade principles into their core business practices. This includes making sure that the price they pay their suppliers allows them to pay their workers a wage they can afford to live on.

In our experience, the only way to achieve widespread, sustained solutions to the endemic problems such as child labour, poverty wages and excessive working hours that beset the global garment industry is through collaboration.

We will therefore work with Primark and all our member companies, trade unions and non-governmental organisations to collectively tackle, and find solutions, to the serious issues that were highlighted through the Panorama programme, and that all retailers face in putting their ethical trade principles into practice.