

Workers 'exploited for Olympics'

Anti-sweatshop campaigners say the Olympic movement and sports brands are failing to help end the exploitation of workers in the sportswear industry.

By Matt Davis

Activists took to an Athens hotel roof to highlight the plight of workers they say are exploited to produce sports goods marketed through the Olympics.

They say the International Olympic Committee lacks "moral leadership".

The IOC rejects the charge and says it is working to ensure firms respect good employment practices.

'Serious abuses'

Rights' groups coalition Play Fair At The Olympics says its research reveals serious abuses across the world's sportswear industry, including inadequate wages, denial of workers' rights and sexual and verbal harassment.

In a symbolic protest, activists in masks representing "faceless" textile workers sat at sewing machines on a central Athens rooftop, with the Acropolis in the background.

An Indonesian factory worker identified only as Parkati told journalists in Athens that she was sacked for wearing the wrong shoes to work after she tried to set up a union.

Engin Sedat Kaya, a trade unionist from Turkey, said: "Of three million textile and garment workers worldwide, only half a million have any [union] recognition. The rest are working without rights. That is the problem."

Olympic influence

Sportswear companies Nike, Adidas, Reebok and Puma have programmes in place for respecting workers' rights, and Play Fair says the companies are working towards improving working conditions.

It says hundreds of organisations have participated in the campaign in over 35 countries.

But it says many smaller brands - and the IOC - have not responded to their concerns.

"The sportswear companies are much further ahead on this issue than the IOC, but the IOC's voice could be very influential," said Adrie Papma of Oxfam, which backs the campaign.

"But the IOC is refusing to take any moral leadership on the issue, or to take responsibility for workers' rights in Olympic sponsorship and licensing programmes."

The IOC, meeting in Athens ahead of the Olympic Games, did not have a spokesman immediately available.

But the organisation said earlier this year that it is working with a world federation of sporting goods manufacturers to ensure workers' rights are respected.

It has also pointed out that the IOC does not control the licensing of products sold by sporting goods companies, and it held talks with the Play Fair group ahead of the Games.

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