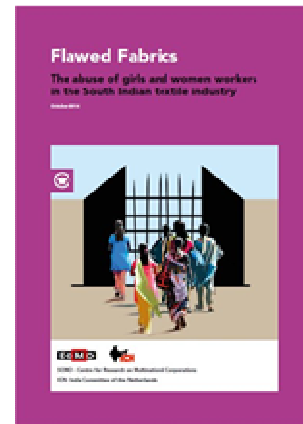


Report on (child) slavery in Indian textile production leads to action

November 19, 2014

The new report *Flawed Fabrics* of the India Committee of the Netherlands (ICN) and SOMO about child labour and 'modern slavery' in Indian spinning mills supplying to well-known garment brands clothing companies drew a lot of attention and led to various actions.

Flawed Fabrics shows that child labour, exploitation and forced labour are still a daily reality in the textile industry in South India. Girls and women are forced to work long hours for low wages. They live in hostels and are almost never allowed to leave the premises. The teenagers and young women are mostly belonging to poor and vulnerable Dalit communities. The five researched spinning mills supply to western brands include C&A, Primark and Replay and garment factories in Bangladesh. Most companies are still barely active to address these abuses.



Overwhelming media attention

The media attention following the publication of the report was overwhelming and still continues. *NOS Journaal* (Dutch TV news program), *Jeugdjournaal* (TV news program for the youth), the front page of the daily *Volkskrant* and many other Dutch newspapers and websites report about it. There were also many articles on English websites, including many fashion and clothing sites like *Vogue*. We wrote a blog for *The Guardian* website ourselves. The English *Times* has published its own feature story, while referring to *Flawed Fabrics*, which in turn was reported by various Indian media. The heading of the *Times* article reads: "The cotton in your clothes is probably made by girls of 11 paid 6 pound a month".

Companies announce action

Most companies mentioned responded to the report. Both C&A and Primark promised further investigation. "We appreciate your input and insights", wrote C&A to SOMO. Primark says 'to be happy with the report and the therein made call to action', reports the *Volkskrant*. H&M, which buys yarn from one of the investigated Indian spinners for its garment production in Bangladesh, severed the relationship. However SOMO and ICN do not agree with that approach. They asked H&M first to make efforts to improve the labour conditions in the supplying spinning mill.

The well-known certifying organization *Social Accountability International (SAI)* responded in detail to the report. In two of the spinning mills approved by SAI serious violations were found to exist, the report concluded. SAI informed SOMO and ICN that they consider the report as a complaint against the two spinning mills and will consider what improvements are needed. They will also look at the functioning of its accredited auditing firms.

Minister Ploumen talks to Indian colleague Gandhi

Already before the publication of the report ICN sent a letter to Minister Ploumen asking her to discuss the issue during a trade mission in early November with her Indian colleagues and other stakeholders involved. In a public statement after on her trip she indeed said she discussed the issue with Minister for Women and Child Development, Mrs. Maneka Gandhi. Minister Ploumen said after her visit that child labour is still prevalent in India: "It is estimated that approximately 44 million children work on a daily basis, especially in the garment and footwear industry and in agriculture... Minister Gandhi has indicated that she will work on this issue."

Answer to parliamentary questions by MP Voordewind unsatisfactory

In response to the report Member of Parliament Voordewind asked some questions to Minister Ploumen, including how she will address companies and trade associations on the issue and how she plans to work together with the EU, the ILO and the OECD to address "modern slavery" in the Indian textile industry. However, the Minister remains vague in her answers and says only what is done by those organizations in general, but nothing about what she will do specifically on this problem. She also does not say anything about possible follow-up appointments with Minister Gandhi to work on solutions.

Members European Parliament want action from European Commission

MEPs Peter van Dalen (CU), Agnes Jongerius (PvdA) and Cora van Nieuwenhuizen (VVD) ask the European Commission to raise the issue of (child) slavery in the South Indian textile industry to European companies that source their products. They also want the Commission to raise the issue to European trade organisations, the members of the EU, the Indian government, the International Labour Organisation and the OECD, in order for joint action to be undertaken.

The MEPs note that there is 'an alarming lack of transparency' in the clothing companies in this and other issues. They ask the Commission to take the initiative to "significantly increase the level of transparency and reporting of clothing companies with respect to their impact on human rights" and how the Commission will address this.

What does *Stop Child Labour* do?

Stop Child Labour and its member organisation India Committee of the Netherlands work on combating child labour, including in the production of textiles and garments. Therefore we participate in the working group on child labour which is part of the Plan of Action of the Dutch trade associations in the textile and clothing industry. We also cooperate with organisations in India to combat child labour and child slavery. We will continue to address child labour in the textile and clothing industry and to work on solutions together with local organisations, companies and governments.

Report *Flawed Fabrics*: <http://www.indianet.nl/FlawedFabrics.html>

Overview media attention: <http://www.indianet.nl/FlawedFabrics-in-de-pers.html>

Article *Times*: <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/uk/article4268655.ece>

Answer to parliamentary questions by MP Voordewind: <http://www.indianet.nl/pdf/kv141114e.pdf>