

Reaction of India Committee of the Netherlands (ICN) on statements of John Lewis, Habitat and Nobilia in the article ‘John Lewis and Habitat halt sale of worktops over slavery claims, stone sold in UK shops is from Indian quarries that abuse human rights, investigation reveals’ in The Observer, Sunday 3 September 2017.

John Lewis told the observer that “In light of this report and pending further investigation, we have made the decision to remove from sale black/ star galaxy granite and are currently investigating all granite sources worldwide.”

The statement continued: “As a socially responsible retailer, we require our suppliers not only to obey the law but also to respect the rights, interests and wellbeing of their employees, their communities and the environment. We do not source granite directly. We work with one UK importer who has signed up to John Lewis code of practice on responsible sourcing, which sets out in detail the standards that we expect our suppliers to meet on labour standards and the environment.”

A spokesman for Habitat said: “All our suppliers have to meet our high welfare standards and we won’t hesitate to take appropriate action if any supplier is found to be in breach of these.” Habitat kitchens are sold by the instore concession K tchenhaus, which is the UK subsidiary of German company Nobilia, the world’s biggest kitchen manufacturer. In a statement Nobilia confirmed that, “Star galaxy granite samples have been removed from the Habitat stores and Habitat have now stopped selling star galaxy [worktops].”

The statement continued: “All products sold in a store next to or in combination with Nobilia products should meet the same high welfare, environmental and quality standards as the products supplied by us and we do not hesitate to take appropriate action if any supplier is in violation of these standards.”

With the research report ‘*The Dark Sites of Granite, Modern slavery, child labour and unsafe work in Indian granite quarries. What should companies do?*’ ICN calls upon natural stone companies to take effective measures against human rights abuses in lower tiers of granite supply chains. Only removing granite products from stores and changing suppliers without taking measures to address human rights abuses in supply chains, will not result in improvements in working conditions of granite quarry workers in India. For effectively addressing the human rights violations uncovered by the research report, ICN urges John Lewis, Habitat and Nobilia and their suppliers to conduct a comprehensive human rights due diligence process, increase transparency in supply chains and provide remedies to victims of violations as required by the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPR) and OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (see also recommendation in section 6.2 in the research report).

Concretely we advise you to first find out with your present suppliers if they are willing to improve their labour rights practices in cooperation with you and other stakeholders like knowledgeable NGOs and labour unions. We are willing to have a further exchange of ideas with you on this.

Furthermore, ICN would like to highlight that the importing companies mentioned by name in the report are not the only companies sourcing granite from the researched quarries, but they are the ones that could be identified as buyers through the analysis of export data (except for Arte, who gave insight in their supply chain). Addressing labour rights violations that are described in the report is not the sole responsibility of the buying companies named in the report, but of all companies sourcing and trading granite that originates from South India, including end-users in the funeral, retail and building and construction sectors.