

Parliamentary questions

14 June 2012

E-005948/2012

**Question for written answer
to the Commission (Vice-President/High Representative)
Rule 117**

Peter van Dalen (ECR) , Thijs Berman (S&D) and Sir Graham Watson (ALDE)

► **Subject: VP/HR — Bonded (child) labour of Dalit girls in garment production of EU-based companies**

Various reports have been published in the last few years on the involvement of European and US garment brands and retailers in garment production in South India, where at least 100 000 girls and young women — mostly of Dalit ('untouchable') or low caste background — work under recruitment and employment schemes that amount to bonded labour. Recently the report 'Maid in India' by SOMO and the India Committee of the Netherlands provided evidence that 37 EU-based companies are sourcing from four large Tamil Nadu-based garment manufacturers where these and related human rights violations are taking place. Following on from an earlier report entitled 'Captured by Cotton', which was published in May 2011, some improvements have been made as a result of pressure from active buyers, NGOs, etc., but according to 'Maid in India', major abuses continue to occur.

1. Is the Vice-President/High Representative willing to raise this corporate social responsibility — (CSR) and human rights-related issue — which concerns numerous European companies — with the Indian Government, with a view to working on a joint solution?
2. Is the VP/HR willing to raise this issue with the EU-based companies involved in order to come up with a joint plan of action, to monitor its implementation and to report the results achieved to Parliament every year?
3. Is the VP/HR, in view of the Commission's criteria for effective self- and co-regulation processes on CSR (point 4.3. of the EU strategy 2011-2014 on CSR), willing to work with the garment industry as a pilot in order to develop a code of good practice for self- and co-regulation exercises (point of action 5 of CSR strategy)?
4. Is the VP/HR, in view of the Commission's endorsement of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, willing to demand full supply-chain transparency from the European garment industry, for example as the Dutch Parliament has recently demanded in a motion?
5. Is the VP/HR willing to bring up this case in the context of the EU-India free-trade negotiations as input for the discussion about the sustainability chapter and how issues like this should be dealt with under the EU-India free trade agreement?

Parliamentary questions - Answers

8 August 2012

E-005948/2012

Answer given by High Representative/Vice-President Ashton on behalf of the Commission

Child labour is firmly on the EU's human rights agenda in India, with project-financing and policy discussions in the local Human Rights Dialogue. During India's 2012 Universal Periodic Review five Member States sponsored recommendations on which the EU will work with India. India is also preparing an amendment to its Child Labour Act that should pave the way for ratification of the related ILO conventions.

The Commission works towards the elimination of child labour and supports the action of the ILO and the European social partners of the textile and clothing sector in this field. It is working with stakeholders to develop a Corporate Social Responsibility human rights guide for industrial sectors, based on the UN Guiding Principles for business and human rights.

The Commission is also producing guidance material on Business and Human Rights for SMEs and has recently overseen a study on responsible supply chain management. The recommendations for enterprises to conduct due diligence for responsible supply chains are spelled out in the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. The Commission is furthermore developing a code for self and co-regulation, on which public consultation is under way, and in which the garment industry would be welcome to participate.

Concerning the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations, the inclusion of a chapter on sustainable development is an EU objective and, as with other recent FTAs, this should be based on transparency and dialogue rather than on sanctions. Such a chapter would provide an overall framework based on internationally recognised standards and agreements, including the ILO's core labour standards, and while its negotiation is a sensitive matter, the EU's position on it remains firm.