

Question for written answer  
to the Commission  
Rule 117

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► Subject: Child labour and shoe production

Recently a report entitled ‘Where the Shoe Pinches — Child Labour in the Production of Leather Shoes’, by the Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations (SOMO), provided evidence that child labour and violations of labour rights frequently occur in the production of leather shoes and other footwear in India for European companies and in the extended international supply chain of these EU-based companies<sup>(1)</sup>.

The ‘Stop Child labour — School is the best place to work’ campaign carried out a survey on the production of shoes, but most companies did not respond to the questionnaire. Moreover, the survey results show that European shoe companies with an active corporate social responsibility (CSR) policy confine themselves mostly to environmental issues.

Is the Commission willing to raise this CSR and human rights issue in its relations with countries producing footwear for the European market — in particular China, India, Vietnam and Brazil — and to look for ways to involve the governments of these countries in working on solutions?

Is the Commission, in view of its endorsement of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the revised OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, willing to engage with the European footwear industry in order to achieve full supply-chain transparency in this sector and to use its convening power to work on a concrete plan of action with the industry in order to tackle labour and other human rights violations throughout the supply chain?

Is the Commission willing to raise this issue in the context of the EU-India free trade negotiations, including the possibility of a dispute settlement mechanism and the involvement of civil society?

In the light of the new 2011-2014 EU strategy for corporate social responsibility<sup>(2)</sup>, what else can and will the Commission do to combat child labour and other human rights violations in the footwear industry supplying EU-based companies?

Is the Commission willing to initiate additional research into (child) labour and other human rights issues in the worldwide footwear industry, which supplies leather footwear to the European market?

Will the Commission combine this research with recommendations as to how all relevant stakeholders can work on solutions?

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(1) For the report, please see: <http://www.stopchildlabour.org/Stop-Childlabour/News-Items/Shoe-companies-keep-silent-about-child-labour>

(2) COM(2011)0681.

#### Parliamentary questions

12 September 2012

[E-007450/12](#) [E-007451/12](#)

Joint answer given by Mr De Gucht on behalf of the Commission

Written questions : E-007450/12 , E-007451/12

The Commission works towards elimination of prohibited forms of child labour, based on the 2010 Council conclusions on Child Labour, the 2011 Communication on an EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child and the ILO International Programme on Elimination of Child Labour. EU addresses root causes such as poverty and education through a comprehensive framework and promotes ratification of two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and ILO Conventions Nos. 182 and 138. The 2012 EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights foresee EU participation in the 2013 Global Conference on Child Labour and promotion of updated hazardous work lists under ILO Convention No 182. Child labour is on EU's human rights agenda in India with project financing and Human Rights Dialogue. India is amending its Child Labour Act paving way for ratification of the ILO conventions.

In trade/investment negotiations, the Commission aims at incorporating Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), as done in Free Trade Agreements with Korea, Cariforum and Colombia/Peru. They encourage adherence to internationally recognised instruments such as the OECD Guidelines for multinational enterprises linked to the network of National Contact Points — agencies mandated to contribute to resolving issues like these questions. The Commission pursues this approach involving stakeholders like the European industry and considers it founded on sufficient understanding of CSR without the need for further research at present. The Commission has published a call for building up 'European multi-stakeholder platforms on CSR in relevant business sectors', open to all industry sectors, and works with enterprises and stakeholders to develop human rights guidance.