Public Letter to The Just Group

Dear Mr McInnes,

I am writing to ask you take more seriously the issue of wages and working conditions for the workers who make your goods. According to Oxfam Australia the overwhelming majority of women and men employed in the clothing industry in Asia, Latin America and other parts of the majority world are paid very low wages, are denied the right to organise trade unions, and work under highly exploitative conditions.

Just Group has publicly promised that your company "will not knowingly deal with any supplier who uses under-age, forced or illicit labour of any kind. To help protect this position, we are signatories to the Outworkers Code in Australia and use our agent Li & Fung's extensive compliance division to actively audit our offshore suppliers."

I was therefore disappointed to learn from Oxfam's new "Transparency Report II", released in March 2009, that Li & Fung rates poorly in terms of its efforts to eradicate sweatshops. Li & Fung has a code of conduct for its factory suppliers and monitors that code itself. But Li & Fung refuses to release information about the way that monitoring is done, whether any labour violations are found, and whether any steps are taken to correct problems. Li & Fung keeps secret the names and addresses of all its supplier factories, which makes it impossible for an external organisation to verify workers' conditions.

I urge the Just Group to call on Li & Fung to improve their transparency.

In addition, I call on the Just Group to:

1. Ensure full-time wages are at least adequate to meet the basic needs of workers and their children.

2. Publicly disclose the list of factories that produce for Just Groups' labels.

3. Release auditing reports which disclose labour rights violations, including violations of workers trade union rights, and how these are being addressed.

I look forward to hearing that you have addressed these concerns.

Yours sincerely,

(More than 1000 supporters have signed this letter. Their names have been delivered to The Just Group.)