

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Saturday, April 4, 2009

Contact: Guillermo Martinez - 518/455-5102

Religious Leaders, Social Justice Groups & Lawmakers Demand Ethical Business Conduct from all State University Campuses, Unveiled Proposed Law

As the largest public university system in the nation, SUNY continues to use exploited labor to produce campus apparel, worker rights coalition demands that the Chancellor and Board of Trustees put in place rules that stop campus business relationships with sweatshops

◁ALBANY, NEW YORK (04/4/09) – The longest-serving Hispanic lawmaker in New York, Assemblyman Peter M. Rivera, today, was joined by over 100 members of a broad coalition of worker rights groups to criticize the State University of New York's decades-old and disgraceful practice of allowing sweatshops to produce campus apparel for 60 of the 64 college system. The coalition composed of labor unions, religious leaders, student activists, and lawmakers also unveiled details of a proposed law that would force ethical business behavior on all SUNY campuses.

According to Assemblyman Peter M. Rivera, "60 of the 64 State University of New York campuses are satisfied with taking part in human rights violations by using sweatshop labor to produce campus apparel. SUNY schools are beneficiaries of work product tarnished by physical abuse, excessive working hours, deplorable work conditions, and inadequate wages."

"SUNY has failed to follow the lead of other major public and private universities and it is clear that it will not disengage this deplorable business practice voluntarily. So it is the duty of the State Legislature to force an end to this practice by passing the Ethical Business Conduct in Higher Education Act I have introduced and is strongly supported by this coalition and many elected officials."

Standing on the grounds of the University at Albany, one of the only four SUNY campuses that have disengaged business relationships with sweatshops and has established a model campus apparel program, Rivera said, "It is my understanding that right now somewhere on this campus, SUNY college presidents are celebrating the system's 60th Anniversary. Well I strongly urge them to make sure that during next year's festivities they can celebrate a collective respect for all humanity by having totally eliminated their business dealings with sweatshops."

According to Jordan Wells, Labor-Religion Coalition of New York State, "Our SUNY campuses have fallen behind the curve on ending sweatshop conditions in the factories producing collegiate apparel. Enactment of the proposed legislation would set New York on a path to lead the charge in taking on this enormously pervasive global problem."

According to Candace A. Merbler, President, United University Professions, Albany Chapter, "UUP supports legislation that would require all SUNY campuses to adopt the Designated Supplier Program which is associated with the Worker Rights Consortium. UUP's Delegate Assembly passed a resolution in February of '08 calling on SUNY purchasing officers to implement the intent of sweat-free legislation by seeking to contract with responsible, sweat-free vendors, and to extend sweat-free provisions to cover all apparel contracts."

Jackie Hayes, Students for Workers' Rights and UAlbany Fair Trade Alliance and Masters student in the Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S. Latino Studies Department at UAlbany stated, "Students have been asking SUNY to support workers' rights for over a decade now, it is time for SUNY to go sweat-free. SUNY cannot continue to act as an isolated institution, disconnected from a growing, interconnected global economy. Instead, we must define how we interact with the world by adopting a stringent set of sweat-free policies. Our connections with other communities locally and around the world should be based on mutual respect, not on exploitation."

"As members of the labor union movement we are committed to the following: Workers deserve a voice on the job. The best way to eliminate sweatshops is for workers to have the power to advocate for their interests on a daily basis through the collective voice of a union. University products must be made in factories where workers have this voice to eliminate sweatshop abuses," **declared Dr. Raul Huerta, United University Professions Executive Board Member, Vice President for Professionals, Morrisville Chapter.**

"Workers deserve a living wage. The prices paid by U.S. clothing companies are simply too low for factories to pay workers enough to meet their basic needs. In order for workers to earn the income they need, we must require brands to pay the designated factories prices high enough to enable living wages."

Guillermo Perez, President of the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA), Albany/Capital District

Chapter, stated, "We join Assemblyman Rivera in demanding that all SUNY campuses immediate adopt sweat-free standards in the purchase of athletic apparel. As an AFL-CIO affiliate that advocates on behalf of Latino working people, we deplore the repression and exploitation of apparel workers in Latin America and elsewhere. The State Universities of New York should be a model for ethical business conduct, both for their students and the broader public. It is past time for the SUNY Central Administration to affiliate with the Worker Rights Consortium at all its campuses and end its support of sweatshops."

The proposed law introduced by Assemblyman Rivera requires that the SUNY Chancellor and its Board of Trustees adopt a mandatory sweat-free code of conduct for all its campuses, establishes a timeline for such rules to be in place, mandates that all college apparel contracts include a "null and void" provision to allow them to end business relationships with manufacturers who violate worker rights, and requires campuses to participate in the Designated Supplier Program to verify compliance with rules. Additional legislation will target private colleges that receive state funds as well.

The University at Albany, SUNY Buffalo, New Paltz and Cortland campuses are the only four schools that have actively ended their relationships with sweatshops. Large university systems such as the University of California, Rutgers, and Washington State University have seen their governing boards put in place sweat-free policies.

###