



UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON SYSTEM
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RENU KHATOR
Chancellor, UH System
President, University of Houston

March 3, 2008

UH Students Against Sweatshops
c/o Timothy J. O'Brien
1303 Ruthven Street
Houston, Texas 77019-5139

Dear Students:

I write to acknowledge your concern about the fair treatment of garment workers who produce collegiate apparel that is sold on our campus, and your specific recommendation that the University of Houston become a member of the Workers Rights Consortium (WRC) and join that organization's Designated Suppliers Program (DSP). While I am generally happy to see students' passion for any social or political cause, I must say that I am disappointed in the antagonistic manner in which your group has chosen to engage in advocacy. Your tactics are not only disruptive but counter-productive to the cause.

A university is a community of scholars, and I expect a more collegial manner of raising issues and concerns. I'd like to outline the approach I am using to address your specific request.

Being new to the University, it was essential that I receive a full briefing on this matter from my colleagues on the cabinet. I have now received that briefing, and have evaluated our existing practices. While the University of Houston is not a member of the WRC, I am pleased to learn that our current practices embody the same spirit and commitment to workers' rights.

It's important to note that Adidas, one of the three largest vendors of collegiate apparel at UH – is already a member of the Fair Labor Association (FLA), an organization created to promote a uniform international labor standard and to improve working conditions worldwide. The other two UH vendors, Collegiate Licensing Corporation and Barnes & Noble, have adopted a code of conduct consistent with that of the FLA.

It is absolutely clear that the University of Houston is committed to fair labor practices. There is also value in evaluating ways to further improve our practices, so I have taken an additional step and have appointed a committee to review this matter, chaired by Steven Craig, professor of economics and former President of the UH Faculty Senate. I have asked that group to examine this issue in detail, review the licensing code of conduct, evaluate practices at peer institutions, and recommend whether signing the DSP is a desirable means to achieve our shared objective.

I am aware that the U.S. Department of Justice has refused to endorse DSP and that no other university in Texas—public or private—has signed it. It is important for the University of Houston to adhere to federal and state laws and to remain focused on its core mission of education. Therefore, I am seeking the expert advice of this newly appointed committee, and I have asked that its recommendations be presented to me no later than the end of June.

In the meantime, I ask that you respect the collegial approach we are taking to address this issue. You must immediately stop any and all disruptive behavior. Any such behavior will be subject to discipline under university policies and procedures.

Thank you for your engagement, and I wish you much success in your studies.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Renu Khator". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line at the end.

Renu Khator

cc: The Daily Cougar