



## WORKER RIGHTS CONSORTIUM

March 10, 2016

Scott Deitz, Vice President  
Public Affairs  
VF Corporation  
105 Corporate Center Blvd.  
Greensboro, NC 27408

### **Regarding: Detention of Chinese Labor Rights Advocates (Guangdong, China)**

Dear Scott,

I am writing to you concerning the ongoing detention and criminal prosecution of prominent labor rights advocates who were arrested on December 3, 2015 in a government crackdown in Guangdong, China.<sup>1</sup> We believe this situation requires VF's attention, since, as you know, Guangdong is a global export center for apparel manufacturing, including for products sold under VF's Jansport brand that are licensed by universities and colleges affiliated with the WRC.

The individuals who have been detained are some of Guangdong's leading independent civil society voices advocating for the rights and welfare of factory workers in the garment industry. The case of these detained advocates poses a significant test of VF's commitments, both to universities and colleges and the public at large, to ensuring respect for basic labor and human rights in your global supply chain.

On December 3, 2015, Chinese police carried out a series of surprise raids on the homes and offices of staff members and volunteers working with several local labor rights groups in Guangdong, and held at least 21 persons for questioning. Six prominent labor rights advocates who were among those held were then placed under ongoing criminal detention.

Two of the six detained labor rights advocates were subsequently released on bail, but expelled from the province. Of the remaining four detainees, three associated with a civil society

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Phillips, "He Xiaobo: latest victim of China's crackdown on labour activists," *Guardian (U.K.)* (Feb. 2, 2016), <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/02/he-xiaobo-the-latest-victim-of-chinas-crackdown-on-labour-activists>.

organization called the Panyu Workers Center, Mr. Zeng Feiyang, Ms. Zhu Xiaomei and Mr. Meng Han, have been charged with the criminal offense of “gathering a crowd to disturb social order,” which carries a potential lifetime prison sentence. The fourth detainee, Mr. He Xiaobo of the Nanfeiyan Social Work Service Center, has been charged with “misappropriation of occupational funds,” which also carries a potential life sentence.

**As of today, three of these labor rights advocates, Zeng Feiyang, Meng Han and He Xiaobo, are still detained. The fourth, Zhu Xiaomei, was released on bail on February 1, 2016. The criminal charges against all four are still pending.**

In the face of the control of Chinese labor unions at the national and provincial level by political authorities and at the workplace level by factory owners, independent civil society organizations like the Panyu Workers Center and the Nanfeiyan Social Work Service Center play a vital role in assisting Chinese workers to resolve labor disputes, secure compensation and treatment for occupational injury and illness, and obtain legally owed severance payments and social security contributions. Often, however, they have been targeted by government authorities, acting in the service of the same political and business interests, with detentions, evictions and administrative harassment.

**The current persecution of independent civil society organizations who advocate on behalf of apparel workers in Guangdong, China constitutes a severe violation of basic human and labor rights that VF has committed to promote and uphold, and that are core principles of your own corporate policies, collegiate licensing agreements, and the standards of the industry organizations in which you participate.<sup>2</sup>**

VF has committed that “All factories that produce VF branded apparel and footwear must ensure that the people who make our products are guaranteed certain essential rights: [including] . . . the right to associate freely . . . [and that] [w]e regard these rights as non-negotiable imperatives in the workplace regardless of location.”<sup>3</sup> University codes of conduct, likewise, require that licensees ensure that their suppliers of collegiate apparel “respect the right of employees to freedom of association,” and “[i]n countries where law or practice conflicts with these labor standards . . . take effective actions . . . to achieve the maximum possible compliance.”<sup>4</sup>

VF has chosen to have its products, including collegiate licensed goods, manufactured in China, where the ordinary exercise of a fundamental human and labor right – freedom of association – is not permitted by government authorities and employers. VF is obligated, both in moral terms and under the specific standards noted above, to oppose the persecution of those who attempt to help

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<sup>2</sup> VF, “Human Rights in Our Supply Chain,” (<http://sustainability.vfc.com/people/worker-well-being-at-suppliers/human-rights-in-our-supply-chain/>); Fair Labor Association, “Workplace Code Benchmarks” (“When the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining is restricted under law, employers shall not obstruct legal alternative means of workers association.”).

<sup>3</sup> VF, “Human Rights in Our Supply Chain,” <http://sustainability.vfc.com/people/worker-well-being-at-suppliers/human-rights-in-our-supply-chain/>.

<sup>4</sup> Collegiate Licensing Co., “Special Agreement Regarding Labor Codes of Conduct” (2008).

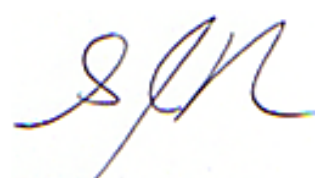
workers exercise this right. And, as a significant buyer of apparel from China, VF possesses the economic leverage to exert meaningful influence.

Therefore, the WRC requests that VF demonstrate its commitment to respect for freedom of association by:

- 1. Expressing VF's concern about the current repression of labor rights advocates, in writing, to the Chinese government; and**
- 2. Requesting the immediate end of the detention and the dismissal of all charges against the labor rights advocates, Zeng Feiyang, Meng Han, He Xiaobo and Zhu Xiaomei.**

We look forward to hearing from you concerning this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'SN', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Scott Nova  
Executive Director  
Worker Rights Consortium