

LS&CO. Affects Positive Change in Mauritian Labor Conditions

In 2002, TOE violations were discovered in one of our suppliers in Mauritius arising from discrimination against migrant workers. Levi Strauss & Co. (LS&CO.) staff determined that the Mauritian Ministry of Labor did not have the resources to monitor and enforce compliance with Mauritian labor law -- primarily as it related to migrant worker rights.

LS&CO. withdrew production from Mauritius pending improvements in the country's implementation and enforcement of labor law. This was one of the rare cases in which the company suspended production at the country level. We immediately undertook an integrated effort to advocate on behalf of migrant workers in Mauritius to both the U.S. and Mauritian governments and to multilateral organizations such as the International Labor Organization (ILO).

LS&CO. representatives worked with the Mauritian government, pressing for reforms that would address the systemic discriminatory labor practices in Mauritius. With our TOE experience, we were able to serve as consultants and provided officials with advice in defining and implementing a program to address migrant workers' rights. LS&CO. wanted the Mauritian government to provide sufficient resources to monitor and enforce compliance with labor laws, as well as resources to educate and communicate with migrant workers so that they could become aware of their rights as workers.

Simultaneously, LS&CO. representatives met with the U.S. Government (State Department, Labor Department and the U.S. Trade Representatives Office at the White House) to inform them of the discriminatory practices and to encourage them to pressure the government of Mauritius to seek resolution. This provided an opportunity for LS&CO. to leverage Mauritius' desire to retain trade benefits with the U.S. (under the African Growth and Opportunity Act) with the country's labor practices. Our goal for this part of the work was to increase apparel trade with Africa. To ensure that trade benefits continued, it was essential that the government of Mauritius address the systemic discriminatory practices against migrant workers in that country.

As a result of our efforts, the Mauritian government created the "Inter-Ministerial Committee on Foreign Labor," a cabinet-level committee to examine labor conditions for migrant workers, and ultimately strengthened its local labor laws. LS&CO. worked closely with the international community and met with multilateral organizations to seek resource support for Mauritius' new cabinet-level labor committee.

In this case, LS&CO. was able to affect positive change in labor and human rights beyond our suppliers' factory walls by engaging in government advocacy and the public policy process.

