Standing Committee on Labor Standards and Human Rights

Minutes
Meeting of February 23, 2001

Members present:  Kristen Ablauf, Alan Deardorff, Sioban Harlow, Rob Howse, Veronica Johnson (by phone), Kevin Kolben, Larry Root, and Steve Rosenberg

Members absent:  Louis Green and Scott Trudeau

Guests:  Bruce Siegel (by phone) of the Collegiate Licensing Company (CLC)

The Committee discussed the FLA monitoring plan and the approval criteria/process for the approval of monitors. Some members expressed the desire that the University play a proactive role in the selection of monitors. In response to the questions raised, it was suggested that we arrange to have someone from the FLA participate in a future meeting to clarify these issues. The chair agreed to try to make arrangements for this participation.

The Committee discussed the challenge of creating/implementing a means for ensuring that complaints concerning production of University of Michigan licensed goods can be aired and investigated.

As currently constituted, the two organizations that University of Michigan has provisionally joined—the FLA and the WRC—are respectively intended to address monitoring and complaint-handling.

The Committee discussed ways (beyond the specifics of a licensing code of conduct) in which the University could be involved in issues related to labor conditions and human rights. We have talked about issues such as exploring hours of work, how to investigate accusations of violations, and health and safety standards/protections. Such issues offer possible areas for symposiums and research initiatives.

The Chair reported that the University is providing support for a “globalization and labor” initiative at the Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations which is intended, in part, to address research and teaching goals related to the work of the Committee. These could take the form of symposiums, forums, course development, and support for research. It was also noted that the International Institute has an ongoing graduate seminar, addressing key themes, and that the theme next year is globalization. This may present a number of opportunities for collaborative efforts.

Topics for exploration that have emerged thus far from Committee work include: issues of health and safety; explorations of working hours; challenges of monitoring and complaint-investigation; and definition/application of the concept of a “living wage.” More broadly, issues of the integration of economic and social considerations represent an underlying challenge.

The idea was raised of developing symposiums or forums, possibly based around the production of a issues-paper or “white paper” to provide a focus for discussion.

In addition to these ideas, a number of other approaches have been raised. For example, Linda Lim (School of Business) has raised the idea of developing internships with key businesses or NGOs. Andy Crawford (College of Engineering) has been working to establish medical clinics in apparel factories in Bangladesh. Such endeavors suggest additional ways in which the University could engage in issues related to globalization and labor.

The next meeting will be Friday, March 16, 8:30-10:00.