Committee on Labor Standards and Human Rights  
University of Michigan  

Minutes—Meeting of January 18, 2002

Present: Kristen Ablauf, David Deeg, Louis Green, Sioban Harlow, Veronica Johnson (via speakerphone), and Larry Root,

Absent: James Hines, Rob Howse, Kevin Kolben, and Steven Rosenberg

New Era Cap Company. The January 2 letter from the president of New Era Cap Company to the Chair was distributed, in which they requested additional time to respond to the Committee’s request for information. They indicated that they would be responding in the “very near future.” The Committee discussed this response and further steps. The Chair was charged with following up by phone with Tom Freer, New Era’s human resource director, to determine how soon we can expect a response. It was decided that if they are not planning on providing the information within two weeks, we should request that they provide an interim report within that time frame.

The Committee discussed potential courses of action for the University. Kristen Ablauf agreed to contact the CLC in order to clarify what actions have been taken by those schools that have indicated that they were not going forward with their standard contracts with New Era. (Members of the Committee reported that Wisconsin, Duke, and Georgetown have cancelled their contracts and that UNC was renewing for only 3 months at this time). It was noted that continuing to have a relationship with the company provided some leverage for the University in seeking to effect positive change. Kristen was also asked to seek legal advice from internal staff concerning the basis needed for stopping or suspending an ongoing contract. This specific question was discussed in the context of the broader issue of what is the appropriate tact for achieving social change in the arena of labor standards.

It was reported that it appeared that New Era had engaged an outside monitor to inspect its plants. The Committee discussed the issue of how to determine the credibility of such a monitoring organization. The Chair suggested that he would contact the WRC to see if they had information about the outside monitor and their qualifications and/or reputation in dealing with these issues.

The Committee talked about the ongoing strike at New Era’s Derby plant and whether the issues involved might represent issues that are not violations, per se, of our code of conduct. It was noted that anti-union actions could be violations of the freedom of association provision.

Disclosure of Factory Locations. Kristen Ablauf raised the issue of the timeliness of the factory location data provided on the University’s website. Under current procedures, the CLC provides data to the University that is converted by the staff of the News and Information Service and made available through the Web. Because of the normal turnover in manufacturing locations, the data on the website is often outdated. Even the quarterly updates provided by the CLC tend to be out-of-date by the time it is has been converted and uploaded to the website. This may raise problems—an perhaps liability issues—for the University. For example, he licensing office recently received a complaint from a company that had discontinued its licensing agreement and objected that its factory information was still on the University’s website.

After discussion, in which it was noted that the University’s data is also available through the WRC website, the University would alter its current approach. Visitors to the website would be informed of the location of the University’s information on the WRC website (with the URL or a “hot-link” to the data). Visitors would also be given the e-mail address of Kristen if they wanted to be e-mailed current factory information about a particular company or all of U.M.’s licensees.

Future Meetings. The Committee discussed scheduling meetings this semester on the third (3rd) Friday, of the month. An additional meeting was scheduled for Feb. 1, from 9-11. Because of class schedule, it was decided to meet from 9:00 to 11:00 AM.