

# M&S

EST. 1884

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Rt Hon Harriet Harman MP  
Joint Committee on Human Rights  
Committee Office  
House of Commons  
London, SW1A 0AA

28<sup>th</sup> October 2016

Dear Ms Harman,

Thank you for your letter and for giving us the opportunity to respond in full to the Committee on this matter.

I can assure you that we take standards in our supply chain very seriously - ethical trading is absolutely fundamental to M&S. All of our suppliers are contractually required to comply with our Global Sourcing Principles, which cover what we expect and require of them and their treatment of workers. We take all appropriate measures to promote and enforce compliance with the CSP by our contracted suppliers and we expect them to do the same within their supply chain.

Firstly, I want to be very clear that M&S absolutely does not tolerate child labour anywhere in its supply chain. Our own investigations have not found any Syrian workers under the age of legal employment working in the supplier factory featured in the programme, or any of our Turkish suppliers' factories. Whilst the programme drew attention to the unacceptable issue of children under the age of 15, (the age of legal employment in Turkey), working in the garment industry, this particular allegation was not levied at M&S. We have not found or been presented with any evidence to suggest that it should have been and we continue to closely monitor this complex situation.

We have been fully engaged on the situation regarding Syrian refugees for some time and it is specifically covered as part of our audits in Turkey. Over the last 12 months, our team has contacted and visited all of our Turkish suppliers in connection with this issue and we have run supplier workshops specifically on Modern Slavery and the Syrian refugee crisis, as well as highlighting the change in labour law and the guidelines on how to employ Syrian workers legally. We are members of the in-country ETI Turkey Working Group, working collaboratively with other Brands on a best practice and due diligence approach to protecting Syrian refugees seeking work in the garment industry.

After we were contacted by the BBC with allegations of Syrian workers in one of our factories, we took immediate action to investigate. Within 24 hours of being supplied with the factory name, we conducted our own unannounced audit, which found one Syrian and three Turkish casual daily labourers paid in cash, without wage slips, and employed through an agent working at the factory.

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All these workers were above the legal minimum working age and were being paid a wage equal to comparably skilled permanent workers. However, they did not have the required work permits. In addition, the supplier was not making the required social security payments required under Turkish law.

We took these findings extremely seriously and they clearly put this supplier in breach of our GSP. We have worked closely with the factory to put in place an action plan and they have been fully cooperative throughout this process.

We set them the following action plan which they agreed to in full:

- To offer the 1 Syrian refugee permanent legal employment, with the required work permit. They did this immediately, but the Syrian refugee declined, as he did not want to become part of the formal Turkish employment system.
- They were to back pay any shortfall in social security payments for the Turkish daily workers, which they have done.
- They agreed not to engage daily workers going forward and have put in place strengthened identification verification processes.

We will continue to monitor the factory closely to ensure that they fully adhere to our GSP and will carry out all future visits and audits on an unannounced basis. In addition, we are carrying out further unannounced audits across our other Turkish suppliers to ensure that this incident is isolated to this factory.

We don't tolerate such breaches of our GSP and, as a responsible retailer, it has always been our policy not to immediately cease working with a supplier following an incident such as this, but to work collaboratively with them to ensure our standards are upheld and these issues do not happen again.

Given the scale of the Syrian refugee crisis and of the issue of informal workers in all industries in Turkey, we will continue to work collaboratively with other brands and industry bodies and we have recommended a convening of all brands sourcing from Turkey to establish an industry-wide collective action plan and next steps.

With the brand teams and ETI representatives on the ground and by including the Turkish Government and Employers' Associations, we believe we have an opportunity to help and improve the situation for employment of the Syrian Refugees.

I hope this provides the assurances sought by the Committee, but do not hesitate to let us know if you require any further information or have any further questions.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Rowe', with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the signature.

Steve Rowe  
Chief Executive