

Ensure Basic Human Rights for Tobacco Farm Workers 2011 – Reynolds American Inc.

WHEREAS, corporations have a responsibility to ensure their total “supply chain” is uncorrupted by practices denying basic human rights for workers, especially corporations with global sourcing like ours.

Corporations incur a reputational risk when their suppliers undermine workers' basic human rights, including the right to health (see the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [25], the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [Art. 12] and the ILO Convention [155]).

In the USA., while RAI doesn't directly hire farm workers, it contracts with suppliers who do. When farm workers are denied their right to organize, basic worker rights are violated. This abuse is aggravated when they are undocumented.

In the USA, "many farm workers believe they will be fired and lose their income if they get sick or work too slowly. Green tobacco sickness is an environmental justice issue, part of the growing concern that poor, minority and medically underserved populations bear a disproportionate share of environmental and occupational health risks" (Sara A. Quandt, Ph.D., Science Daily, 02.24.00).

A key problem of tobacco harvesters for RAI is acute nicotine poisoning, Green Tobacco Sickness (GTS). This occurs when the skin absorbs nicotine from touching tobacco plants. GTS threatens 33 million+ tobacco farm workers globally (WHO, 1999 World Bank).

Malawi is a key leaf supplier for RAI products. Besides being highly susceptible to forms of GTS, countless children are being forced into slave-like situations to provide leaf for RAI products.

Despite RAI's statement it has hired “independent” monitors to ensure it is not violating U.S. laws and human rights, its U.S. suppliers continue to hire undocumented workers. In places like Malawi, forced child labor persists to the degree that the U.S. Department of Labor lists Malawi's tobacco production as particularly egregious.

RESOLVED shareholders request Reynolds American Tobacco Inc Board of Directors to commit itself to create effective procedures to implement protocols ensuring basic worker rights consistent with internationally agreed-upon human rights conventions in the countries which supply its tobacco and to find ways to ensure, through truly independent monitoring, that its varied suppliers are enforcing these protocols as well as all other pertinent laws of the nations in which its suppliers operate.

Supporting Statement: This resolution's sponsors believe RAI cannot dismiss the above problems by saying its suppliers “report” they comply with codes covering farm workers' basic rights and that no forced child labor takes place in tobacco fields supplying RAI product. Continual data shows such problems are not being redressed either here nor abroad. There must be truly independent verification of the kind that has not yet been effective for RAI. Because farm workers continue to make this Company healthy; it has the obligation to ensure their health.

Support for this proposal will help ensure our profits and dividends are not being realized by exploiting “the least” of our brothers and sisters. Please support it so “good news” may come to those who are poor for whom we bear responsibility as shareholders.