

Laogai Research Foundation Calls on the EU to Suspend Preferential Trade Access for China Under the GSP

Bredenbeck, Germany, December 1, 2009- The Laogai Research Foundation (LRF), in association with the International Society for Human Rights (Frankfurt), formally call on the European Commission to suspend the People's Republic of China's non-reciprocal preferential access to the EU market provided under the GSP scheme until China stops exporting products to the EU made in the Laogai, China's vast system of forced labor prison camps.



The Laogai not only serves to suppress dissent; it also functions as a massive source of free labor. Inmates within the Laogai system are forced to labor long hours in abusive conditions. LRF has documented cases where inmates were working 16-18 hours a day in mines with no protective gear, handling battery acid with no gloves, and standing naked in vats of tanning chemicals. The Laogai Research Foundation has documented hundreds of businesses that advertise their products for export to the US and Europe, and Laogai-made goods find their way into these markets on a daily basis. Unfortunately, due to intentional deception on the part of Laogai enterprises, and a patchwork of incomplete and ineffective international regulations, these Laogai enterprises not only continue to operate, but also to profit handsomely by exporting goods made by prisoners who are not compensated for their labor. Although China officially banned the export of forced labor products, this law is not enforced, and international requests for inspections of suspected Laogai facilities are routinely denied.

For this reason, LRF calls on the European Commission to suspend China's preferential GSP status until China enforces its own laws on the export of forced labor products. Additionally, we call on the EU to consider legislation to ban the import of forced labor products from China.

Peter E. Mueller, European Representative of the LAOGAI Research Foundation (LRF), Washington DC, has already met with several Members of the European Parliament, among them Edward McMillan-Scott, Vice-President of the EU-Parliament, Crescenzo Rivellini, head of the EU/China Delegation, Mrs. Helga Trüpel of the Green Party and Mr. Michael Gahler of the Christian Democrats, but foremost with Mrs. Heidi Hautala, Chairwoman of the EU Human Rights Committee. In these meetings, Mr. Mueller urged them to support the suspension of China's preferential GSP status and consider a ban on the importation of Laogai-made products, noting that the Laogai system of forced labor camps is the PRC's foremost tool of political repression. LRF Executive Director Harry Wu commented, "The EU is typically ahead of the US when it comes to human rights, but on this issue they lag behind." (The US has banned the importation of forced labor products since the 1930s.) Mr. Wu added further, "Basic human rights should not be left behind in the drive to improve economic relations between China and the EU."

The Laogai Research Foundation is a not-for-profit organization founded by former political prisoner Harry Wu in 1992. Its mission is to gather information on and raise public awareness of the Laogai--China's extensive system of forced labor prison camps. For more information, please visit www.laogai.org, e-mail laogai@laogai.org, or call +1-202-408-8300.