

# SWEATSHOPS MUST STOP

**H**ow much are you willing to pay for a sweater or a pair of sneakers? Of course we're all happy when we get a bargain at the mall. But would you be as happy if you knew the price included accidents and death for the workers who made them?

In June 2005, rescue workers needed a week to dig out bodies after a **garment** factory collapsed in Bangladesh. At least 80 people died, and 100 were seriously injured. The factory had a contract to make sweaters for two European companies whose products are sold around the world.

Disasters like this one are a tragedy for the workers. They are also a nightmare for the many companies that employ workers in poor nations to make goods for **consumers** in richer nations. Yet the nightmare doesn't seem to be enough to stop them. The problem, of course, isn't that they give jobs to people in poorer countries. We're all for that. The problem is that the working conditions in those poor countries are often much worse than in the companies' home nations.

In fact, corporations often choose to build or rent factories in places where there are weak health and safety laws, no unions, and low wages. These

companies save on costs and can sell their goods more cheaply around the world. The people who pay the real price are the sweatshop workers who work in poor conditions.

More than 90% of computers, digital cameras, and cell phones are produced by low-paid workers in Asia. For example, the computer-chip maker Intel **employs** nearly 20,000 people in Malaysia, China, the Philippines, and Costa Rica.

Often, international companies will make deals with local factories to produce their goods. Those local suppliers aren't bound by any laws. So factories can become sweatshops—where workers **toil** under terrible conditions for low wages.

Yet there are some signs of progress in the fight against sweatshops. Companies such as Nike and the Gap know they need to protect their good name among consumers. In recent years, both of these companies have adopted new policies. They send their own inspectors to monitor their local suppliers. They try to enforce rules about safety, overtime pay, and human rights.

We think these companies are doing the right thing. And studies have shown that suppliers who respect workers' rights get better quality goods from their employees. It's time for consumers to get educated about sweatshops. Find out which companies respect the rights of workers and which don't. Then buy from those who treat workers fairly. You'll find that's the best deal of all.

AP PHOTOS

A sweatshop in Guatemala (below left) and a cleaner factory in Vietnam (below right)

