

## **Nike coming clean about sweatshops** (Fri 15 Apr, 2005)

### **WARM-UPS**

**CHAT:** Talk in pairs or groups about: Nike / sneakers (US) or trainers (UK) / sportswear / sweatshops / child labor / legal minimum wage / huge profit margins / transparency / workers' rights. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

**NIKE BRAINSTORM:** Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with Nike. Share your words with your partner / group and talk about them.

**SNEAKERS (US) / TRAINERS (UK):** Walk around the class and ask your classmates about their choices and histories of sportswear. Sit down in pairs / groups and share the information you heard. Together, create a questionnaire about sneakers / trainers. Ask your questions to students from other pairs, before returning to your original pair/group to compare what you heard. Make one conclusion and share this with the class. Vote on which conclusion was best.

**WORKING PRACTICES:** Below is a list of the benchmarks the Fair Labor Association used to assess Nike's factories and working conditions. Discuss what you understand by these terms and how they might be applied to Nike:

- a. Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining
- b. Child Labor
- c. Non-discrimination
- d. Hours of Work
- e. Forced Labor
- f. Harassment or Abuse
- g. Health and Safety
- h. Wages and Benefits
- i. Overtime Compensation

Do any of these factors need changing in your present company / companies you have worked for?

**5. 2-MINUTE NIKE DEBATES:** Face each other in pairs and engage in the following fun 2-minute debates. Students A take the first argument, students B the second. Rotate pairs to ensure a lively pace and noise level is kept:

- a. Nike is best. vs. Reebok / Converse ... is best.
- b. Buying goods produced in sweatshops is immoral. vs. Everybody does it.
- c. Paying \$100 for a sports shoe is a sin. vs. You pay \$100 for good quality.
- d. Real shoes look better. vs. Real shoes are for suits and old people.
- e. Nike is a great company. vs. Nike is a typical multinational that abuses workers.
- f. "Just do it" is a cool slogan. vs. People don't need to be told that. Stupid slogan.
- g. There's nothing wrong with working 7 days a week. vs. It's slave labor.
- h. Nike isn't the only company that uses sweatshops. vs. So?
- i. Running shoes are for runners, not for fashion. vs. Nike sneakers are fashionable and cool.
- j. Nike must put its workers first. vs. Nike's first responsibility is to its shareholders.

## PRE-READING IDEAS

**WORD SEARCH:** Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... of the words ‘labor/labour’ and ‘practice’.

**TRUE FALSE:** Guess whether the following statements about the article are true or false:

- a. Nike is going to clean and redecorate its workers gyms and fitness centers. T / F
- b. Nike has been subjected to many allegations that it exploits workers. T / F
- c. Nike released a 108-page document detailing abuse of its employees. T / F
- d. Nike’s profit margins are very small. T / F
- e. The release of the document is welcome news for human rights activists. T / F
- f. Nike has been continually investigated, exposed and embarrassed. T / F
- g. Human Rights First attacked Nike for a lack of transparency in the report. T / F
- h. Nike is changing the pictures in its advertising campaigns. T / F

**SYNONYM MATCH:** Match the following synonyms from the article:

- |                   |             |
|-------------------|-------------|
| (a) infamous      | good        |
| (b) allegations   | openness    |
| (c) unprecedented | limited     |
| (d) abuses        | debunked    |
| (e) restricted    | notorious   |
| (f) conducted     | praised     |
| (g) welcome       | unheard-of  |
| (h) exposed       | violations  |
| (i) hailed        | carried out |
| (j) transparency  | accusations |

**PHRASE MATCH:** Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- |                       |                  |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| (a) coming            | rights activists |
| (b) labor             | forward          |
| (c) working           | practices        |
| (d) restricted        | conditions       |
| (e) legal minimum     | the ground       |
| (f) welcome           | wage             |
| (g) human             | clean            |
| (h) long-suffering    | news             |
| (i) an important step | employees        |
| (j) the facts on      | access           |

**SPOT THE MISTAKES:** There are four mistaken words in each paragraph. Find and circle them. Try to think of a better word.

### **Nike coming clean about sweatshops**

**BNE:** Nike is finally coming dirty over its infamous and dubious labor practices after years of allegations that it exploits workers, many of whom have been alleged to be children. The company has made available on its website an unprecedented and detailed 108-page novel of the 705 worldwide factories that produce its footwear and clothing. The document details things from factory locations, working conditions of its 650,000 employees and abuses of those workers. Just over half of Nike's Asian employees work more than sixty hours a day; up to fifty per cent have restricted access to toilets and drinking water and work seven days a week; and a quarter of workers receive less than the legal maximum wage, despite Nike's huge profit margins.

The release of the report, conducted by the independent Fair Labor Association, is welcome news for human wrongs activists who have continually investigated, exposed and embarrassed Nike for its sweatshop practices. Releasing the document now means Nike's factories can be independently monitored to provide better working conditions for its short-suffering employees. Michael Posner, executive director of Human Rights First, hailed the report as "an important step backward" and praised Nike for its transparency. But he added: "The facts on the ground suggest there are still enormous problems with these supply chains and factories." He asked the important question: "What is Nike doing to change the picture and give workers fewer rights?"

### **HOMEWORK**

- 1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.
- 2. INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find information on Nike and sweatshops. Share your findings with your class next lesson.
- 3. LETTER TO NIKE:** Write a letter to Nike expressing your thoughts on the publication of their report. Read it to your class in your next lesson.
- 4. MY NIKE LIFE:** Imagine you are a Nike worker in a sweatshop. Write the diary/journal entry for one typical working day in your life. Talk about what you wrote in your next class.

## DISCUSSION:

- a. Did you already know a lot of what was in this article?
- b. Was there anything in this article that made you happy?
- c. Was there anything in this article that increased your respect for Nike?
- d. What do you think of Nike?
- e. Do you have / Have you ever bought... any Nike products?
- f. What do you think of the “Just do it” slogan?
- g. What do you know about sweatshops?
- h. What are working conditions like in your country?
- i. Do you know of any other multinational that gets bad press for its labor practices?
- j. Should anyone be reprimanded or punished for worker abuses?
- k. Why do you think Nike is suddenly coming clean?
- l. Many companies promote healthy living but the lives of workers who make their products are anything but healthy. Do you think about this when buying sportswear?
- m. Oxfam has the “anti-slogans” “Just stop it” and “Whose sweat is on your shoes?” on one of its websites (<http://www.oxfam.org.au/campaigns/nike/>). Are these effective in making people think?
- n. Who is more important today, the shareholder or the worker?
- o. Would (do) you work more than sixty hours a week?
- p. What would you do if your boss denied you anything to drink?
- q. What do you think of working for less than the legal minimum wage?
- r. Should there be a law that requires companies making huge profits to reward its lowest paid workers with bonuses instead of its executives?
- s. Are Tiger Woods and other sports stars guilty of helping Nike exploit workers?
- t. The Fair Labor Association said it found no evidence of child labor in Nike factories. Do you believe this ?
- u. Did you like this discussion?
- v. Teacher / Student additional questions.

## TEXT

**BNE:** Nike is finally coming **clean** over its infamous and dubious labor practices after years of allegations that it exploits workers, many of whom have been alleged to be children. The company has made available on its website an unprecedented and detailed 108-page **report** of the 705 worldwide factories that produce its footwear and clothing. The document details things from factory locations, working conditions of its 650,000 employees and abuses of those workers. Just over half of Nike’s Asian employees work more than sixty hours a **week**; up to fifty per cent have restricted access to toilets and drinking water and work seven days a week; and a quarter of workers receive less than the legal **minimum** wage, despite Nike’s huge profit margins.

The release of the report, conducted by the independent Fair Labor Association, is welcome news for human **rights** activists who have continually investigated, exposed and embarrassed Nike for its sweatshop practices. Releasing the document now means Nike’s factories can be independently monitored to provide better working conditions for its **long**-suffering employees. Michael Posner, executive director of Human Rights First, hailed the report as “an important step **forward**” and praised Nike for its transparency. But he added: “The facts on the ground suggest there are still enormous problems with these supply chains and factories.” He asked the important question: “What is Nike doing to change the picture and give workers fewer rights?”

\*[http://www.fairlabor.org/2004report/companies/participating/companyProfile\\_nike.html](http://www.fairlabor.org/2004report/companies/participating/companyProfile_nike.html)

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## EXTRA FLUENCY ACTIVITIES

**CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY:** Divide into the following two roles. Students A (pairs or groups) are factory workers in the “Niker” sports shoe factory. Students B (pairs or groups) are company executives of the “Niker” international sportswear company. Use the benchmarks from the Fair Trade Association below to create some simple rules about your company’s working practices:

- a. Freedom of Association (Joining a Union) and Collective Bargaining
- b. Child Labor
- c. Non-discrimination
- d. Hours of Work
- e. Forced Labor
- f. Harassment or Abuse
- g. Health and Safety
- h. Wages and Benefits
- i. Overtime Compensation

After you have created your rules, workers and executives meet to negotiate the best policy for the company.

**“NIKER” ROLE PLAY:** Use the following role play cards in a discussion about Niker sportswear company – The role play theme is a BBC TV documentary, titled, “Is Niker a wonderful company to work for?” Discuss your roles and “strategy” before the role play begins. After the role play, discuss whether you really believed what you were saying.

### THE ROLES:

#### **Student A**

You are a 32-year-old father of five children in Indonesia. Your employer makes you work 70 hours a week without overtime pay. You cannot drink anything nor go to the toilet while working. If you complain you will be fired. Your pay is below the legal minimum wage and is not enough to buy food for your family. Support student C. Attack student B. Ask why student D is wearing Niker shoes and a Niker shirt and cap.

#### **Student B**

You are a top executive at Niker. You are proud to employ 650,000 people around the world. You think your workers should thank you for their jobs. You have visited many factories – all the workers are very happy. You hate human rights activists (Student C). You receive \$1,000,000 a year in bonuses. Paying the legal minimum wage in Indonesia would mean no bonus for you.

#### **Student C**

You are a human rights investigator with a huge amount of information on the terrible working conditions of Niker. You have evidence of extensive use of child labor, rampant sexual harassment (80% of Niker’s workers are women, management is men), employees forced to work 15 hours a day, and factories that are health and fire hazards. You think the Niker executive (Student B) is the greediest person in the world.

#### **Student D**

You are a BBC TV producer. You are making a one-hour documentary on Niker and its working practices. You want the programme to be hard-hitting and the full truth to be told. You hate multinational companies. However, you really like Niker products and are wearing some today. Oh, and by the way, you grew up in Indonesia and have many relatives working for Niker.

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