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Sportswear firms slammed on Olympic gear

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International sportswear firms are violating the rights of millions of workers in a bid to fill shops with their latest goods in time for the August 2004 Olympic Games, according to a new report.

International aid agency Oxfam, together with the Clean Clothes Campaign and Global Unions organisation, accused the sportswear industry of "ruthless tactics" by denying workers their fundamental rights in the run-up to the Athens games.

At the same time, the trio of organisations launched a campaign, entitled "Play Fair", calling on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and leading sportswear manufacturers to clean up their acts.

"The IOC has an obligation to challenge the abusive business practices of its sponsors and licencees," they said in a joint statement.

"The industry needs to make prices fairer, deadlines more appropriate and treat labour standards as important a set of criteria as cost, time and quality."

The report pin-pointed international sportswear firms Fila, Puma, Umbro, Asics and Mizuno as among the culprits.

"Giant sportswear brands are violating the rights of millions of workers around the world in order to fill shops with the latest and cheapest sports shoes, clothes and accessories in time for the Athens Olympics," they said.

Testimonies had been sought from workers and factory managers in Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Thailand and Turkey, they said.

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