

Sydney Morning Herald - June 1, 2004

Olympics supports sportswear sweatshop, says agency

The Olympics movement was ducking its social responsibility by supporting sportswear companies which used sweatshop labour practices, a leading international aid agency said today.

Oxfam said the International Olympic Committee (IOC) was awarding licences to use its logo to firms which violated workers' labour rights.

Ahead of Friday's arrival of the Olympic torch in Sydney, Oxfam will stage a "sew-in" in Sydney's Martin Place today. It would feature 20 people working at sewing machines to symbolise millions of exploited, faceless garment workers across the world, Oxfam said.

Volunteers posing as Olympic athletes, and carrying lit torches to represent the Olympic flame, would weave their way through the sewing machines.

Oxfam Community Aid Abroad executive director Andrew Hewett said the IOC and Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) were doing little to help improve workers' lives.

"We call on the AOC and IOC to use their strength and influence to bring companies together to ensure compliance with international labour standards in the sportswear industry," he said.

"They have a duty to uphold the spirit of the Olympics with respect to fair play and human rights by making proper employment conditions a provision of their licensing agreements with companies producing Olympic uniforms and sportswear."

Oxfam predicted the Athens Games would generate about \$US66 million (\$A92.6 million) in royalty revenues for Olympics souvenirs such as caps, sweatshirts and T-shirts.