

# COVID Fashion Commitments

## Frequently Asked Questions

Updated 30/06/2020

### Our Approach

#### *1. Why has the Ethical Fashion Report changed this year?*

While we would have loved to continue with the EFR as planned this year, there are a number of key factors that have shaped our decision to change:

- There is a significant and immediate risk to workers in this crisis. Our usual assessment process focuses on long-term change and establishing the processes and systems to protect workers and the environment. While this is still the best way to bring about sustainable long-term change and will return next year, the immediate (short-term) risks faced by workers demands a more streamlined and agile approach. In changing focus we urge companies to take action now.
- Many companies are in partial or complete shutdown at the moment and have limited capacity to engage with our usual research process.
- As the pandemic continues, there will be ongoing disruption to supply chains. In changing our approach, we can be more adaptable to respond to and report on this ongoing disruption.

For these reasons, we have chosen to narrow our focus – with the intention to be more impactful to the immediate risks that workers face.

### Company Commitments and Actions

#### *2. What does a company commitment need to look like? Is there a template?*

Fundamentally we are calling on companies to publicly commit to standing together with workers in their global supply chains. The commitment may come in a number of different forms – it could be an endorsement of global initiative such as the ILO Call to Action, your own disclosure on a company/brand website or social media, or a public statement in support of the COVID Fashion Commitments themselves. Whichever form it takes, this commitment should be made **publicly** in order to hold the greatest accountability with workers and consumers. We have not created a single template for what a company's public commitment should look like. This allows us to recognise a diverse range of responses, provided they can reasonably be shown to cover the issues outlined in the six COVID Fashion Commitments. We will be monitoring public disclosures

and ask you to share links or other documents that demonstrate the commitments you have made.

*3. Do companies need to commit to all 6 of the commitments?*

Companies and brands should make commitments that cover the full scope contained within the six COVID Fashion Commitments, as these provide a reasonable and holistic response to protecting supply chain workers from the risks and vulnerabilities experienced during this crisis. All six of the commitments speak to important aspects of these responsibilities and together include aspects that may be simpler to respond to, and likely already standard practice, as well as other aspects that may require more significant changes. Where some commitments may not appear immediately feasible, companies are encouraged to start by indicating their support for those they are able to affirm and deliver, while continuing to engage and collaborate with others to identify viable pathways to achieving the remainder.

*4. How are companies required to share information about the actions they have taken?*

We encourage companies to share information about the actions they are taking publicly where possible. Where that is not appropriate, you are welcome to inform us privately via email. Per our usual process, we will ask follow up questions where necessary. We understand that each individual company will take a different approach to meeting the commitments and we expect actions to vary company to company. We will focus on collaboration and open dialogue to ensure we understand your approach and the actions you are taking.

*5. Is there a template for companies to submit their actions and evidence?*

We have created a simple template that companies may choose to use when submitting their actions and evidence against the COVID Fashion Commitments to Baptist World Aid. This is designed as a helpful tool only and is not a requirement. Companies are still very welcome to submit their response in a form that is appropriate to their needs.

*6. What are the validation requirements/ how will you be verifying information?*

Our usual research process (including the survey tool) sets the benchmark for what we expect of companies in ordinary circumstances. For any companies that are able, we would love to see that level of detail and documentation this year – transparency is as important as ever. However, acknowledging that the fashion industry is facing incredible uncertainty, we are deliberately adopting a more adaptive and flexible approach this year. The current disruption and dislocation is impacting different companies in different ways; hence we are simplifying the reporting requirements and asking that companies provide sufficient evidence to validate the commitments and claims they are making.

Validation requirements will be tailored according to the actions the company has pledged to take. This can be submitted to us privately, as we understand there may be sensitive company information involved. We will work with companies to determine what is reasonable for each commitment and continue to provide more specific guidance as required.

Prior to developing the COVID Fashion Commitments, our team had completed in-depth research to pre-populate the surveys for every company we assess. As such, we each have a strong understanding of what company practices look like outside of COVID-19. We will certainly take this into account as we assess the commitments and actions that companies are taking in the coming months.

*7. Will the information companies provide be made public?*

Company commitments (which will already be public) are being collated and published on the [Baptist World Aid website](#). We will report on company actions in the COVID-19 edition of the Ethical Fashion Report. As in previous reports, documentary evidence will not be made public. Should we wish to highlight your actions as a best practice case study, we will contact you to ensure we have approval on anything being published.

*8. What is the timeline, and what is expected for the 17 July deadline?*

We encourage companies to make a public commitment as soon as possible. There is a recognised trade-off between the need to take immediate action as the greatest risks are being faced by workers at the present time, and the reality that it may take some time for decisions to be implemented and verifying evidence to be obtained. The 17 July deadline has been set as an effort to balance these factors and is sufficiently close to encourage prioritisation of immediate efforts while still allowing enough lead-time for these efforts to be designed and initiated. Companies should share commitments - and evidence of their implementation and effectiveness - as soon as they are available. By the 17 July deadline, companies should share all relevant information and evidence to support the commitments they have made to workers.

*9. How do the COVID Fashion Commitments fit with other global campaigns?*

A number of global initiatives and campaigns to support workers in this crisis have been established in recent weeks - most notably the ILO-led [Call to Action](#). While these initiatives each have their own unique focus, they are all well aligned with the focus of supporting garment workers' wages and wellbeing. Many of these initiatives are global in their scope and may not include or have easy pathways for adoption by all of the key brands operating in Australia and New Zealand. It is why we have identified an important contribution for the COVID Fashion Commitments and the ongoing work of the Ethical Fashion Report to work with the Australian and NZ industries on a holistic set of commitments to protect workers.

We acknowledge that each of these campaigns will have their own requirements and are committed to ensuring our own process is as simplified and streamlined for companies as

possible. The goal is to ensure good outcomes for worker wellbeing – not to add new burdens! Where companies have committed to and are acting on relevant related initiatives, we will gladly work with you to identify how this aligns with the key areas we have identified in our commitments, and to recognise and celebrate that work.

*10. How will you be sharing best/promising practice case studies?*

Our intention is to share cases studies and stories of good and promising practices both with consumer audiences and with the companies involved in the research. However, we will not share any commercially sensitive company-specific information provided to us without the explicit consent of the company involved.

*11. Is Baptist World Aid facilitating collaboration between fashion brands?*

Baptist World Aid has hosted a series of industry webinars throughout June to facilitate collaboration and share information. You can view the recordings [here](#). We are also pleased to be moderating a new Microsoft Teams channel that provides a space for companies to communicate with each other. Please contact your primary researcher for further information.

## **The Ethical Fashion Report**

*12. What will the Ethical Fashion Report look like this year?*

In 2020 we will publish a special edition of the Ethical Fashion Report that is explicitly focussed on the impact of COVID-19 on garment workers and the response of companies. While company responses will be graded, we will use a more simplified grading approach which will be distinctly different to the regular EFR grading. It is intended to recognise effort, collaboration and solidarity. We acknowledge that the challenges the retail sector has faced in recent months will have an enormous impact on workers and will seek to tell that story. The report will draw on qualitative evidence of the practices that have been effective in this time, as well as the more streamlined set of quantitative company data.

*13. What will the grading look like this year?*

The grading in the Special Edition of the Ethical Fashion Report will intentionally be distinctly different from our regular (A-F) grading approach.

The report will identify the companies that have made credible commitments to their workers – and those that haven't. It will also report and provide a simplified grading based on the delivery of those commitments. We want to encourage collaboration, innovation and effort as companies respond in the interests of their workers and will seek to recognise all meaningful efforts made. We will be distinguishing between companies that are:

- i. Taking no tangible steps to support workers in their supply chain – making public commitments but with no evidence of taking action on them, or not making any commitments
- ii. Taking some tangible steps – meeting some commitments
- iii. Demonstrating best/promising practice - meeting all commitments, or demonstrating a level of distinction beyond what most companies accept as standard practice

#### *14. What is the relevance of this report and its message after the pandemic?*

One of the primary reasons we changed our reporting this year is acknowledging that our usual process captures a somewhat retrospective picture of the supply chain. In a time where conditions are more stable, this presents an accurate picture of current conditions. However, in this time of instability, our usual process would not have sufficiently captured the immediate risks that workers face in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Between now and the report release, we will be providing consumers with updates on the commitments companies are making and the actions they are taking – so that they can stay up to date on the most current information available. The October release will be the culmination of this first phase of engagement – a more comprehensive piece that paints a picture of how the industry has responded to that point. As it is likely that the virus itself will still be impacting directly upon workers and supply chains and the longer-term implications will just be beginning to become apparent, it provides an opportunity to identify the lessons learnt in the initial response and ensure these are subsequently built upon. We will also continue to follow up on these impacts and commitments as part of the ongoing Ethical Fashion Report initiative.

#### *15. How will the report cover the challenging year Australian retail has faced?*

We want to tell the story of what the industry currently looks like and how the livelihoods and wellbeing of garment workers are impacted by the state of fashion companies. The COVID-19 pandemic, store closures, retail layoffs, supply chain disruption, brands collapsing into administration and the Australian bushfires are all part of that story.

We acknowledge that this year has been particularly difficult for Australian retailers, and seek to stand together to redouble efforts to build a resilient, fair and sustainable garment industry that delivers opportunity and wellbeing for all of its key stakeholders – especially the most vulnerable workers.