

## **Heineken response to Australian Council of Trade Unions campaign raising concerns about the situation of women promoting beer brands in Asia**

2 June 2006

*Heineken gave the following statement to the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre in response to this item by the Australian Council of Trade Unions:*

*media release - "New Campaign To Lift Wages and Prevent HIV Deaths Among Beer Promotion Women", 27 May 2006: [http://www.actu.asn.au/work\\_rights/news/1148623323\\_3424.html](http://www.actu.asn.au/work_rights/news/1148623323_3424.html)*

### **Heineken and promotion women**

#### **General**

Heineken has always taken its responsibilities in relation to promotion women in Cambodia and has always advocated an industry-wide approach for maximum effect. This is also the reason why Heineken developed various initiatives in the past together with national and international organisations, industry representatives, governmental organisations, but also sales people, outlet owners, customers and promotion women themselves. They should all be involved in a change of attitude. In this context, the picture sketched by Ms Sharan Burrow of ACTU is rather inaccurate or at least unbalanced.

In Cambodia promotion women are employed through special agencies and via partners of Heineken. Heineken is responsible for training promotion women in selling our beers in a professional and responsible way, for training promotion women how to deal with clients and for organising a safe working environment. Sales staff and outlet owners are involved in the programme and there are also initiatives to inform the consumer.

#### **Cambodia**

In Cambodia, approx. 180 women work for the Heineken brand and approx. 700 work for our regional and local brands. In 2003, Heineken and Asia Pacific Breweries (APB) / Cambodia Brewery Ltd (CBL), together with CARE, started a comprehensive training programme under the name 'Selling Beer Safely' in order to train and support promotion women in health and safety. The objective of the programme is organised to equip the promotion women with the skills to act professionally, to deal with difficult customers and to remain in control. The total programme includes:

Work organisation including supervision, transport, skills levels, counselling, hygiene and uniforms.

Information, instruction and training in such areas as selling beer, alcohol-related issues, appropriate behaviour in dealing with customers, personal health.

HR issues including selection, contracts, working conditions, safety, medical care and privacy.

Women promoting the Heineken brands earn a base salary. Problems are more likely to occur if promotion women get paid on the basis of commission payment only.

#### **Support**

What Heineken offers is fair labour, salary and working conditions, as well as training. Whether people are contracted for an indefinite period of time or temporarily, it's all about professional behaviour and responsible attitudes of all people involved, both promotion people and customers. A change in the terms of employment would, for that matter, not change the attitude of the customer, so the latter need to be approached as well. Nevertheless, the take-home salaries of the promotion women are higher than the legal base line salary in the garment sector, the biggest employer of women in Cambodia.

Many other initiatives are being taken, including the development of a code of conduct for promotion women. Non-compliance with this code will result in appropriate action/sanctions. We also review incidents, including harassment by others. Heineken has a reporting system in place according to which the management is informed about promotion women's incidents on a six-monthly basis.

In the meantime, the approach of Heineken/CBL has been regarded as a best practice. This, and the results of the fruitful collaboration with CARE have also triggered CARE's Cambodia study. CARE and Heineken will continue their collaboration in revolving this issue.

Heineken considers this to be a human rights issue and we will continue to act accordingly. Yet, further research is required. Heineken initiates research itself and supports empirical studies by other recognized organisations.

#### **HIV / AIDS**

Heineken, as any other company, cannot demand anyone to undergo compulsory HIV tests, so there are no sound insights into the occurrence of HIV among promotion women. We have not seen any credible study that estimates HIV prevalence at 20% among promotion women. So, whether the prevalence of HIV among Heineken promotion women is the same as the general figure reported by ACTU remains a question.

Many organisations have joined in trying to resolve this issue, including the Reproduction Health Association of Cambodia (RHAC). Heineken actively approaches the local authorities in order to develop initiatives with the aim to educate customers in order to change their attitude. Information and education on health issues belong to the core of the Heineken programme. Together with CBL, Heineken has organised access to medical care for promotion women.

Heineken wants to emphasize that promotion women do not want to be stigmatized, directly or indirectly, as sex workers or prostitutes. With regard to any forced sexual contact, Heineken ensures a safe working environment where these forced contacts cannot take place and we are very much committed to this.

Sexual and physical harassment is without any doubt a violation of Human Rights as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We are, however, not accessory to this kind of violation. It is our responsibility to create conditions in which such violations cannot take place. There is no evidence between the HIV infection and the work as a beer promoter. Studies have shown that most unsafe sex is with boyfriends, not with incidental sexual partners during work.

#### **Recent media coverage of ACTU campaign**

The number of promotion women working in Cambodia (whether working for Heineken or in general) as stated in the ACTU media release is not a number recognized by Heineken, neither does Heineken recognize the general statistic of 20,000 women. The question remains whether this figure also includes waitresses in restaurants and karaoke bars.

The amount women earn is not an amount Heineken recognizes. The salary earned by promotion women working for the Heineken brand is higher, even though they work part-time. In addition to this, many families in Cambodia gain income from several jobs to earn a living. Hence, it is incorrect to link a particular salary with any conclusion concerning forced prostitution. Some promotion women send savings to family members in the country and contribute to the life of these rural families.

At the shootings mentioned in the article, no promotion women working for Heineken were involved. Cambodian society has a violent history and is still rather violent. Illegal imports are substantial and this contributes to the poor image that haunts the legal operators. All parties involved need to contribute to the improvement of today's Cambodian society: the government, the private sector and the people.

Results of the research conducted by Canadian academics and estimates by local doctors are unclear and cannot be traced back to Heineken. In addition to the programmes mentioned above, Heineken is developing further support, education, codes of conduct and recommendations. Heineken also fully supports the recommendations made by CARE.

In this context, it would be incorrect to suggest that Heineken does not accept its responsibilities. But Heineken cannot do this alone. We need to approach this issue together with all responsible parties involved: brewers, distributors, outlet owners, governmental and non-governmental organisations, as well as customers and promotion women.

For further details on the Heineken/CARE case study, please see the enclosed document or contact Heineken at the following address:

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