

“Clean Clothes Campaign rejoinder”, 22 June 2022

NEXT say they have had no business relationship with Neo Trend since 2020, and that the factory’s closure a year after this relationship ended is unrelated. However, this is incorrect. NEXT’s was the last order processed by the factory in August 2020, and nothing was produced for any brand following this order. The factory remained ‘trading’ although it did not produce anything, through to July 2021 (a year after Next's last order as they say) due to the Turkish Government’s ruling that no workers could be dismissed during the lockdown. However, on the day the ban was lifted, all the workers were fired by text message and they were not paid the severance, wages and leave payments they are owed.

NEXT may have paid for all their orders in full. However, we believe their failure to commit to future orders during the pandemic essentially made it impossible for the company to continue trading. We also would challenge NEXT to provide evidence to the contrary that they were not the sole buyer at the factory in 2020. Workers state that they cannot remember producing for any other buyers at the time and we have not found evidence of any other brands being involved. NEXT’s business in any case was critical at the supplier.

Regardless of who cancels the relationship between brands and suppliers, the people at the bottom of supply chains should not be left to bear the cost of closure. These workers who completed garments for Next and helped generate the profits they hold are still waiting for their due payments - people who can’t afford to be left with debts of this scale. Responsible Exit Strategies are something that NEXT has made a commitment to, and the slow decline of orders needs to trigger processes to protect workers' rights when factories shut. In the absence of proper due diligence legislation, buyers such as NEXT have a moral duty to ensure payment for their workers. They were the last brand in the factory, so they must take responsibility when suppliers fail to pay.

The much-reduced risk that brands enjoy the vast majority of the time in the garment industry, needs to be offset by a responsible approach taken when the liability for workers’ rights isn’t picked up by suppliers. Factory closures are a case in point, where the disappearance of employers doesn’t remove the human rights duty on companies further up the supply chain to ensure that workers are dismissed legally with the full amounts owed under the law. We hold that NEXT should step in and pay workers the sums they are owed at Neo Trend, Turkey.