

“More sweatshop, only we can do business the right way”

In June 06, 2006, New York Times Columnist, Nicholas Kristof wrote opinion article about opening sweatshops in Africa, one of the most poorest continents in entire world. He sparked a debate over the role of "sweatshops" in poor countries as one of the gateways in economic development. But my personal opinion about sweatshop in Third World Countries is like two ways traffic. Just as every coin has two sides, the term of sweatshop has two sides of untold story and it is hard to state which side is evil or good. Despite, many people have seen sweatshop as evillious workplace, but for those who have diabolical condition in life, sweatshop seems to be a merciful blessing. As ancient philosopher Augustine once said, *“There cannot be good without bad”*. This is absolute metaphysical idea about the structure of reality. And this very ideology somehow relates to dramatic sweatshop issue. In truth, the issue of sweatshop is not only in Africa, but it becomes a global concerns and it is very much related to global poverty and human traffickings. Kristof had failed to mention several facts and my opinion on his supportive sweatshop campaign in Africa is cute but it is still wrong in many aspects, too.

In fact, why do many Western and American university students campaign against sweatshops? It is because the work environment often involve low level wages, excessive working hours, and unsafe or unhealthful workplace conditions. For humanitarianism, this is simple campaign against evil that need to abolish. Sweatshops, in the other hand, are labour exploitation, often victims are women and children in overcrowded workrooms. In most cases in developed countries, 85% of workers are undocumented workers or recent immigrants who don't speak the language of one's residential country, somewhat, most likely unskilled and

unprofessional. But in my opinion, those campaigners against sweatshops are not omniscient. Kristof thought that corporations do care about human rights. Do we really think that corporations like Gap and Nike would care much about some college students' boycott? If companies thought it was more profitable to set up sweatshops in Africa, or anywhere on the planet, they would do so. They explain that student campaigns couldn't deter those corporations at all, but clearly there are other reasons behind the door.

Moreover, Kristof wrote that sweatshop would fight poverty far more effectively than any foreign aid program. But, there are a certain social and economic conditions, are needed even for sweatshops to be possible and operable. Most African nations and Third World Countries have such as a mass of unskilled and unorganized laborers, often including children (forced labor), lack of basic resources such as electricity, water, environmental management systems, and transportations, and political instability in those regions, including red tape and corruption. Therefore, it is hard to implement the efficient supply chains, and the risk is also very high for most companies to make huge investment. Many developing countries hopes to build their economy with manufacturing industries. The ideal seems to be the best way to strengthen the foundation of the country's economy and first step to condemn extreme poverty.

Furthermore, Kristof then talked about a garment factory in Namibia which was forced to close because it was cheaper to import products from China. But, that create another argument for China. Kristof failed to mention the standards of working conditions in China, where labor standards, where working conditions are famously gloomy, which is the main reason behind why China become superpower production giant. Or, rather to force Namibia down to China's level,

then there might be a glimpse of hope in Africa sweatshops campaign. Kristof seem to be under the impression of neoliberalism, who may not realize that if you raise labor standards or pay in Namibia, it is clear that manufacturers will move to where wages are the lowest, consequently follow by worst working conditions. The basic human rights, *“everyone work for profit or benefit.”*

For instant, Nike pay wages in Mexico is four times higher than Indonesia, yet Nike has factories in both countries. It shows that countries don't necessarily need the lowest wages and worst working conditions on the planet to attract investment. Therefore if Namibia is ready to accept low-wage and comfortless working condition for sometimes to develop strength while improving working condition. In fact, there's also argument that industrialized countries had to go through their own sweatshop phase to get to prosper nation. For instant, China has endured almost four decades of industrial revolution that lead to China as one of the world superpower countries. That has come at the expense of its environment and public health. While China's economic boom has greatly accelerated the devastation of its land and resources, the country become the world's largest source of carbon emissions, and the air quality of many of its major cities fails to meet international health standards.

Metaphorically, there are two sides for good and evil. Sweatshops are not entirely bad as long as there are fights for better working conditions at the same time. Even New York's garment workers battled against sweatshops for most of the 20th century, remember the Triangle Shirtwaist fire? In a way, this tragic events demolished the soul of dismal sweatshop, but not entirely. Now sweatshops are flourishing in the city, which only goes to show that labor

standards tend to worsen unless someone, somewhere, is fighting for them. Indeed, working conditions in Cambodia have improved thanks to a unique collaboration spearheaded by the International Labour Organization. Better Factories Cambodia, which BSR is proud to help steer, has made a big difference. Many of our member companies and other businesses have continued to source products from Cambodia because of this partnership, with the result of preserving the very jobs Kristof supports.

The drive to improve working conditions and create economic opportunity for low-wage workers remains essential, particularly in the face of the raising global poverty. There is growing economic pressure on efforts to ensure sustainable supply chains. Kristof's argument that enforcement of labor standards is somehow not in the interests of workers is curiously timed and just wrong. We won't, and shouldn't, stabilize the tottering economy on sweatshops. We will rebuild prosperity by doing business the right way, and even it mean to change or diminish the term "sweatshop". But today, evidence abounds that the fundamental cause of Third World poverty is not entirely the fault at First World greed. Paradoxically, it is the economic, political, dictatorships and social obstacles that developing nations themselves raise to progress by their aspiring poor and greed. At the end of the day, there is a thin line between good and bad, just as ancient pagan religion, the world is, after all, always will be a battleground for good creator and evil destroyer. My message is *"More sweatshops, only we can do the business the right way"*. Let's now talk about corporation tax cut....blah blah blah....