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U.S. Calls on S. Korean Firms to Ensure Exports to U.S. not Involve Uyghur Forced Labor

By Yonhap News Agency, 2023.4.24

U.S. customs officials called on South Korean companies Monday for close monitoring of their supply chains to ensure their products exported to the United States do not involve China's Xinjiang region in light of a new U.S. law that bans products made there over forced labor concerns.

The officials from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection made the call during a seminar in Seoul as they explained details of the U.S. Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, which went into effect last year.

The law bans imports of goods made wholly or in part in the autonomous territory in northwest China, as it considers them as produced with forced labor.

During the seminar, Executive Assistant Commissioner AnnMarie Highsmith highlighted the importance of preventing products made with forced labor from entering the U.S.

She said the U.S. is making efforts to block such products using artificial intelligence-based analysis technology, but added that companies need to take responsibility and monitor their supply chains on their own.

Acting Deputy Executive Director Maya Kamar also said companies should trace back their supply chains over the use of forced labor and be aware of their products' place of origin.



For the First Time an Uyghur was Elected as a Deputy in Japan

By Turkiye Newspaper, 2023.4.26

For the first time in the political history of Japan, Uyghur Turk Arfiya Eri from East Turkistan was elected as a deputy from the Liberal Democratic Party. 33-year-old Eri, who was personally supported by Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida during the election period, became the youngest person in the parliament. Eri, who is the daughter of a family of East Turkistan origin and speaks 7 languages, also served as a civil servant at the United Nations.

It was a first in the political history of Japan. Arfiya Eri, a Uyghur Turk of East Turkistan origin and Liberal Democrat Party (LDP) candidate, was elected in the Japanese

Advisory Council (Sangiin) elections.

According to the news of the Crimean News Agency, 33-year-old Eri, known as the youngest candidate in Japan's ruling party LDP, is 33-year-old from East Turkistan and is in the Japanese Parliament to represent the 5th region of the Chiba province of Japan in the polls announced that she started to her job on April 23. Eri also took the 1st place in the constituency with more than 47 thousand votes.

Support from the Prime Minister of Japan

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida personally supported Eri during the election



period. Going to the constituencies with Eri, Kishida said, “Eri has continued to face great challenges on the world stage throughout her life. At a time when Japan is facing big changes and must act boldly, people like Eri are needed. In the election that will determine Japan’s future. I want everyone to vote for Arfiya Eri!” had used the words.

Who is the Uyghur Turkish Arfiya Eri?

Eri is the daughter of a family of East Turkistan

origin who immigrated to the city of Kitakyushu in Fukuoka prefecture, Japan. Eri’s father, who received Japanese citizenship at the age of 11, is a Uyghur Turk engineer who was educated on a Japanese government scholarship. Eri graduated from Georgetown University, one of Japan’s famous universities. She was educated in various states and speaks 7 languages. She has also worked as a civil servant at the Bank of Japan and the United Nations.

Thailand: Detained Uyghur Asylum Seeker Dies

By HRW, 2023.4.27

Thai authorities should immediately investigate the death of an ethnic Uyghur asylum seeker who had spent nine years in immigration detention, Human Rights Watch said today. The case highlights the need for Thailand’s government to end the indefinite detention of asylum seekers.

On April 21, 2023, Mattohti Mattursun (also known as Muhammad Tursun), 40, died of liver failure in Bangkok’s Suan Phlu Immigration Detention Center, according to Uyghur human rights organizations. He had been detained for illegal entry since March 13, 2014.

“Thai authorities are putting people seeking refugee protection at grave risk by keeping them for years in awful conditions in immigration detention centers,” said Elaine Pearson, Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “Mattohti Mattursun’s death should sound the alarm to end this abusive policy of incarcerating asylum seekers and refugees for prolonged periods.”

As a Uyghur, Mattohti Mattursun faced persecution or other serious harm if returned to China. He was among several groups of Uyghurs who arrived in Thailand in 2014, seeking to travel to Malaysia and on to a third country. In 2015, the Thai government forcibly sent back to China 109 Uyghur men and boys, who were never heard from again. Another 170 Uyghur women and children were permitted to travel to Turkey, their original intended destination. Thailand has since detained the rest – about 50 men – in squalid immigration detention centers, where authorities treat them as illegal immigrants without any rights.

Mattohti Mattursun is the second Uyghur to die in 2023 in Bangkok’s Suan Phlu Immigration Detention Center. Aziz Abdullah, 49, died in February, reportedly of pneumonia.

Uyghurs are predominantly Muslim Turkic-speakers who live largely in the Xinjiang



Uyghur Autonomous Region in China's northwest. Since late 2016, the Chinese government of President Xi Jinping has dramatically escalated repression in Xinjiang. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has determined that the abuses against Uyghurs "may constitute crimes against humanity."

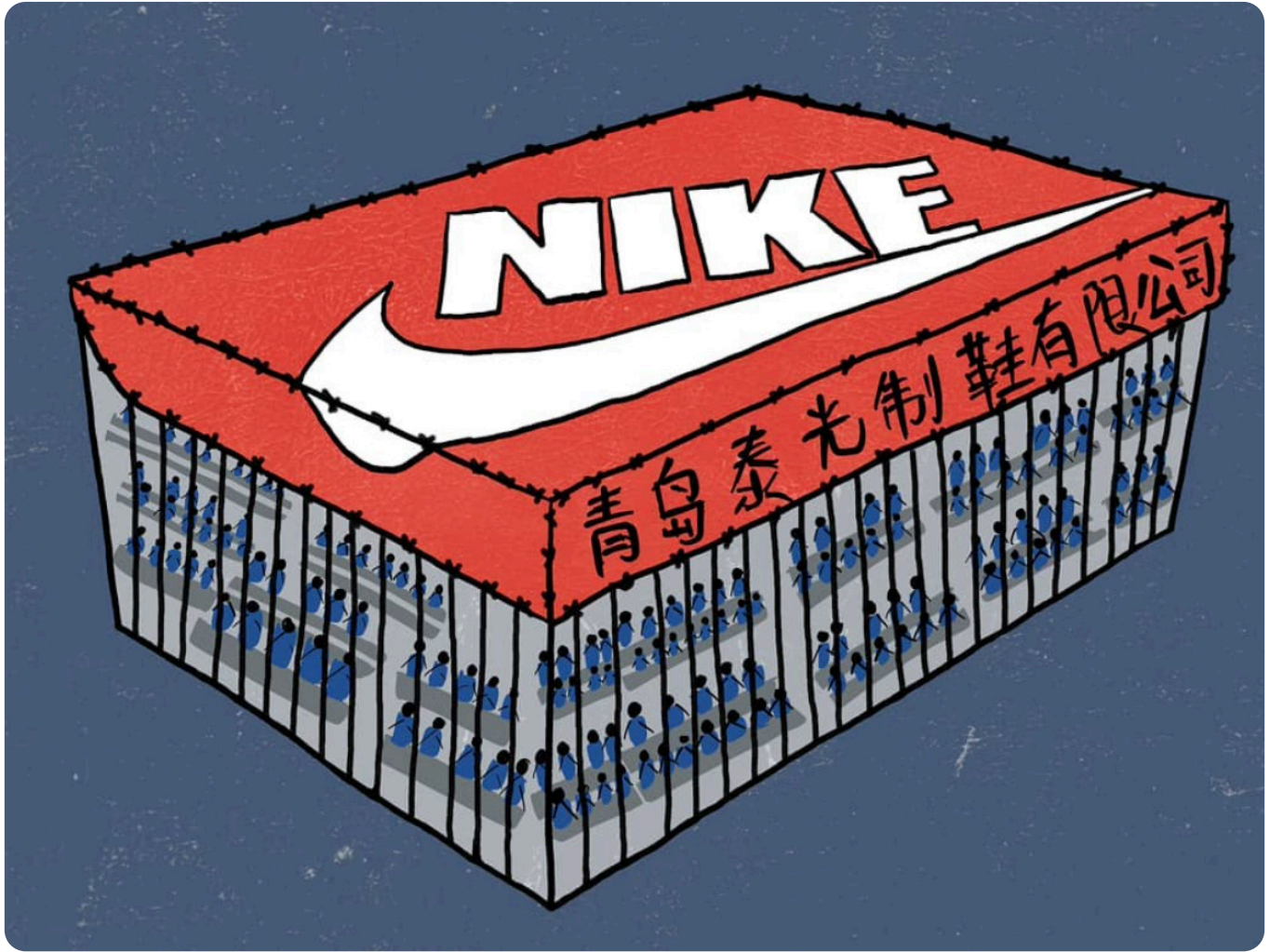
Under Thai law, all migrants with irregular immigration status – including children, asylum seekers, and refugees recognized by the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) – can be arrested and detained for illegal entry. Many immigration detention centers in Thailand are severely overcrowded, provide inadequate food, have poor ventilation, and lack access to medical service and other

basic necessities. Detainees are restricted to small cells resembling cages, where they barely have room to sit, much less sleep. Children are frequently incarcerated with adults.

Conditions in Thailand's immigration detention facilities have long been reported to fall far short of international standards, but the Thai government has not acted to address the serious problems. Human Rights Watch documented these shortcomings in a comprehensive report on immigration detention of children in 2014, and a report on the treatment of refugees, including the detention of urban refugees, in 2012.

Thailand is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and has never enacted a law to recognize refugee status and set out procedures to assess asylum claims. Given its own lack of asylum procedures, the Thai government should respect UNHCR-issued persons-of-concern documents and not detain people who have pending claims for international protection. In addition to ending the detention of asylum seekers, Thailand should adopt alternatives to detention that are being used effectively in other countries – such as open reception centers and conditional release programs.

"The Thai government should recognize that its punitive, indefinite detention policy toward asylum seekers is both inhumane and counterproductive," Pearson said. "Locking Uyghurs up and throwing away the key will not stop them from fleeing the ghastly situation in Xinjiang, and only adds to their misery."



World's Apparel and Sneakers Hub Vietnam Struggles as US Ban on Xinjiang Cotton Bites

By Francesco Guarascio, Khanh Vu, Reuters 2023.4.28

Tighter U.S. rules to ban imports from China's Xinjiang are compounding pressure on Vietnam's apparel and footwear makers, hitting a sector that has already shed nearly 90,000 jobs since October in the global manufacturing hub as demand slowed.

Among garment exporters, Vietnam has faced the worst hit from the the Uyghur Forced Labor Protection Act (UFLPA), a Reuters review of official U.S. data showed. The law, in place since June, requires companies to prove that they do not use

raw material or components produced with Xinjiang's forced labor.

The U.S. clampdown hurts as it comes on top of a drop in clothing demand from richer nations that has already dented industrial output and exports from the Southeast Asian manufacturing powerhouse, a major supplier to big brands such as Gap (GPS.N), Nike (NKE.N) and Adidas (ADSGn.DE).

Of the \$15 million worth of apparel and footwear shipments held up for UFLPA

checks more than 80% were from Vietnam, and only 13% of its cargoes were cleared for entry, U.S. customs data up to April 3 showed.

Many U.S. importers are still sanguine, but their supply chains could still be disrupted as Vietnam's apparel makers depend on China for about half of their input materials, according to the country's industry association.

Vietnamese manufacturers, trade associations and the industry ministry did not reply to Reuters questions about the impact of UFLPA.

The value of shipments from Vietnam that have been denied entry to the U.S. exceeded \$2 million, three times more than those from China - with the sanctions having increased exponentially in the first months of this year.

While U.S. controls have been far more frequent for the electronics industry, especially for solar panels which could be made with polysilicon from Xinjiang, only 1% of electronics cargoes checked were denied entry, as opposed to 43% of apparel and footwear shipments.

In total, customs checked nearly 3,600 shipments worth more than \$1 billion from a range of countries to ascertain they did not carry goods with input from forced labor in Xinjiang, U.S. customs data showed.

Xinjiang LINKS

While the halted shipments represent a tiny portion of the \$27 billion worth of garments and footwear Vietnam exported to the U.S. last year, compliance risks may lead to more painful adjustments for Vietnam.

Frozen trade

Value of shipments of apparel, footwear and textile denied entry in the U.S. or pending approval in application of the Uyghur Forced Labor Act (in millions of U.S. dollars)



Note: as of April 3, 2023
Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Reuters Graphics

That, in turn, will hit U.S. consumers as Vietnam is their main source of cotton apparel, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce.

"Vietnam's heavy reliance on cotton textile materials from China poses a significant risk of containing Xinjiang cotton, as the province produces over 90% of China's cotton," Sheng Lu, Director at the Department of Fashion and Apparel Studies at the University of Delaware, told Reuters.

He said it was unlikely Vietnam could drastically reduce this dependence, also because many manufacturers there are owned by Chinese investors.

An industry and a government official familiar with the matter confirmed that some Vietnamese suppliers may find it hard to comply with the new rules, either because they import cotton from Xinjiang or because they are unable to prove they do not.

The Federal Maritime Commission, the U.S. agency responsible for international ocean transportation, warned earlier this month of potential supply chain disruptions caused by UFLPA checks.

In a survey last year, nearly 60% of U.S. fashion industry managers said they were exploring countries outside Asia for their supplies as a reaction to the forced labor



law.

Sheng Lu said it would be hard for U.S. firms to rapidly find alternative suppliers, therefore more checks on Vietnamese cargoes are to be expected.

Western companies should “make more significant efforts to map their supply chain, figure out where production at each stage happens and demonstrate adequate due diligence”, he said.

SHEDDING JOBS

Weaker demand has forced the industry, Vietnam’s biggest employer after agriculture, to shed nearly 3% of its 3.4 million workers since October, and contributed to an 11.9% drop in the country’s exports and a 2.3% decline in output in the first quarter of this year from a year earlier, slowing growth.

Roughly one in every three pairs of shoes that Nike and Adidas sell globally and 26% and 17% of their clothing, respectively, is made in Vietnam.

However Nike has significantly reduced its output of apparel and footwear in Vietnam despite the country remaining its main manufacturing hub, according to its latest annual report updated to May 2022. It did not reply to questions about UFLPA.

Adidas did not comment on UFLPA either, but said downsizing at its Vietnamese

suppliers would respect local law.

“Vietnam continues to be among our major sourcing countries,” an Adidas spokesperson said.

Gap said it had no shipments detained.

Two officials from U.S. footwear and apparel industry trade associations said the new rules have had no major impact so far on Vietnam and blamed recent job cuts on lower global demand.

Major job cuts in Vietnam were under way at Pou Chen (9904.TW), a major supplier to Nike and Adidas, Reuters reported in February, at a time when it is planning a big manufacturing investment in India.

People were fired at a contractor of U.S. sportswear company Under Armour, and workers had their hours slashed at Regina Miracle International, a supplier of U.S. lingerie giant Victoria’s Secret, workers and executives told Reuters.

Those companies did not reply to Reuters’ questions.

“Normally, firms recruit new workers after Tet (Lunar New Year), but this year everything has gone the opposite,” said Nguyen Thi Huong, 45, who worked for Pou Chen for ten years and recently lost her job.



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Contact Us:

Adres: Kartaltepe Mah. Geçit Sok. No: 6 Dükkan: 2
Küçükçekmece / İSTANBUL
Gsm: +90 553 895 19 33 +90 541 797 77 00
info@istiqlalmedia.com turkistantimes.com