Bestseller defends Jack & Jones over forced labour report

By Sandra Halliday - March 5, 2020

Danish fashion giant Bestseller has responded to a report that implicated its Jack & Jones brand in the use of factories that are linked to forced labour. It said it has no dealings with one company with which its name was linked and that another has well-established ethical and diversity practices.

A report from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute had said the brand and 82 other fashion labels were possibly profiting from forced labour, as Jack & Jones works with two Chinese suppliers, Youngor and Esquel.

Bit it said that “Jack & Jones and Bestseller do not have a cooperation with Youngor. However, [the label] does have a strong and close cooperation with Esquel, which is one of the largest textile suppliers in the world and who are known for their focus on sustainability and strong business ethics”.

Communication Manager, Line Ernlund said that the group and the label “strongly dissociate ourselves from any use of forced labour and we have clearly defined policies in this area”.

Ernlund added that “we are following the general situation in Xinjiang closely and we are taking the Australian report very seriously. The report is new to us and we are now in a dialogue with our supplier to gain more insight.
report very seriously. The report is new to us and we are now in a dialogue with our supplier to gain more insight and clarification.”

But while she acknowledged that the Chinese government has been accused of forcing the ethnic minority group of Uighurs to learn Chinese, receive ideological training and be under constant surveillance in re-education camps, she said Bestseller had no links to this.

“The allegations in the report are about how the recruitment of Uighur workers in textile factories could potentially be linked to the government-instigated training programmes,” she said. “The supplier Esquel has [had an] established presence in Xinjiang for over 25 years through cotton growing, ginning and spinning operations where they have focused on providing quality employment for people of different ethnicities. Uighurs are therefore also an integral part of the workforce in Esquel Xinjiang operations — and of course have equal rights”.

And she said that as of March 3, Esqual confirmed that it does “not use any form of forced labour and that they have not recruited workers from so-called training camps”.

Apparently, it employs about 380 Uighurs out of 1,270 employees in its three Xinjiang spinning mills, and the ratio of Uighurs in the workforce “has been stable for at least the past five years” with the Uighur employee contracts and working conditions being “the same as the other employees and the wages are at par with other employees with similar skills and seniority levels”.

Bestseller relies heavily on Xinjiang province as the area is currently supplying over 20% of the world’s cotton production.

“As a company we see ourselves as a part of the solution and we acknowledge that we, with our presence in our sourcing destinations, have a responsibility,” it said. “We are thankful for the additional transparency that reports such as these bring to the situation in Xinjiang and will continuously work on improving our due-diligence processes in our supply chain”.

But it has no intention of pulling out fo the region and will continue to develop its links with Esquel.

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