

Open Letter from International Civil Society to Fair Trade USA re: Fyffes' Honduran melon plantations



November 27, 2018

Paul Rice  
President & CEO  
Fair Trade USA  
1500 Broadway St., Suite 400  
Oakland, CA, 94612

Dear Mr. Rice,

We, the undersigned organizations, write to you regarding the Fair Trade USA certification of the Suragroh melon plantation in Honduras, a fully owned subsidiary of multinational fruit company, Fyffes.<sup>1</sup> Together we represent human rights and labor organizations in the United States, Europe and Asia, and we stand in solidarity with the Fyffes melon workers who are speaking out to demand their right to join an independent union, *STAS – El Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Agroindustria y Similares* – despite an aggressive anti-union campaign propagated by Fyffes local management.

For more than a decade, Honduran melon workers have reported to *STAS-FESTAGRO*<sup>2</sup> that Fyffes has failed to pay minimum wages or any statutorily mandated benefits such as healthcare, social security, maternity leave, education vouchers, overtime, sick leave or vacation. Workers have reported illegal firings of pregnant workers, exposure to hazardous agrochemicals, and systematic threats and harassment from their supervisors for speaking out to protect their rights.

<sup>1</sup> Fyffes is owned by parent company, Sumitomo, a Japanese conglomerate.

<sup>2</sup> *STAS* is affiliated to *FESTAGRO*, the Federation of Honduran Agroindustrial Unions

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In January of 2016, workers decided to organize a union affiliated to STAS in order to address their longstanding grievances and bargain for improved working conditions. In response, Fyffes local management began engaging in violent union busting activities: intimidating, threatening, illegally firing and blacklisting union members. One prominent example is when Fyffes fired all 65 of its security guard personnel in February 2017, days after it found out they had affiliated to the STAS union.

Fyffes denies all reports of human rights abuses from its workers by relying on the Honduran Labor Ministry and third party audits. However, neither can be taken at face value, given the context of violence on Fyffes' plantations, limiting workers from speaking candidly about conditions during inspections or audits for fear of retaliation. Furthermore, the Honduran Government is currently under review by the International Labour Organization (ILO) for failure to uphold workers' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining (Conventions 87 & 98). The Fyffes case is currently cited in two ongoing international complaints: the 2017 ILO Committee on Freedom of Association and the 2012 CAFTA-DR complaint.<sup>3</sup> On October 12, 2018, The U.S. Department of Labor stated the following regarding remaining challenges in the CAFTA complaints process:

"The violations, which are emblematic of the freedom of association, right to organize and bargain collectively, and acceptable conditions of work concerns raised in the Submission Report, were committed by the following companies: SurAgro, Melon Export (both plantations are part of Grupo Sol/Fyffes/Sumitomo), and Kyungshin Lear. The STSS's work to ensure that violations are effectively remediated will be important in demonstrating that the systemic reforms are yielding results on the ground."<sup>4</sup>

The consistent and ongoing demand from Fyffes workers is for Suragroh management to:

1. End anti-union discrimination; and
2. Respect their universal right to freedom of association by recognizing and bargaining with the independent union organization that workers have elected, STAS.
3. Immediately comply with the Honduran labor code and international standards on working conditions currently being violated, as noted in the U.S. Department of Labor's 2015 report<sup>5</sup> and recent statement, and pay all fines and statutorily mandated benefits owed.

**Until Suragroh-Fyffes adheres to this, they remain in violation of multiple Fair Trade USA Agricultural Production Standards (APS), including the requirement for all certified producers to adhere to national laws and Core ILO Conventions.**

While we recognize that Fair Trade USA requires stakeholders to go through a complaints process, Fair Trade USA should never have certified Suragroh-Fyffes in the first place given the overwhelming amount of public evidence that verifies the companies' consistent engagement in discriminatory practices against union members. By displaying the Fair Trade USA label on products coming from Suragroh, while workers are being intimidated and union busting is occurring, Fyffes is knowingly misleading its consumers. **By allowing this to happen, Fair Trade USA is complicit in the abuse of Fyffes workers and enabling further violations.**

We ask that you acknowledge the evidence presented in the complaint submitted by the International Labor Rights Forum and take immediate action to suspend a company that does not adhere to your standards or the "Spirit of Fair Trade: characterized by respect, collaboration, transparency, sustainable development, equity,

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Labor Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) complaint, <https://www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/pdf/HondurasSubmission2012.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> STSS is the Secretary of Labor and Social Security. For the U.S. Department of Labor's statement, see: <https://www.dol.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ilab/MAP%20Status%20Update%202018.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/pdf/Final\\_Report\\_of\\_Review-Honduras\\_Submission\\_022715\\_redacted.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/pdf/Final_Report_of_Review-Honduras_Submission_022715_redacted.pdf)

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long-term relationships and justice.”<sup>6</sup> Given the severity of the situation on the ground, we expect this process to move quickly and transparently.

Sincerely,

3F  
AFL-CIO  
Banana Link  
Burgerville Workers Union  
Community 2 Community  
Equal Exchange  
Fair World Project  
Food Chain Workers Alliance  
GMB  
HEAL Food Alliance  
International Brotherhood of Teamsters  
International Labor Rights Forum  
International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)  
International Union of Food and Agriculture Workers (IUF)  
Jobs with Justice  
Latin America Working Group  
Manushya Foundation  
Migrant Justice  
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights  
United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries  
United Food and Commercial Workers Union, AFL-CIO, CLC  
Weaver Street Market  
Witness for Peace  
Witness for Peace Southeast

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<sup>6</sup>[https://www.fairtradecertified.org/sites/default/files/filemanager/documents/Complaints%20Procedure/FTUSA\\_PRO\\_Complaints EN 1.0.0.pdf](https://www.fairtradecertified.org/sites/default/files/filemanager/documents/Complaints%20Procedure/FTUSA_PRO_Complaints_EN_1.0.0.pdf)