

Nike backs worker rights through FLA, but not WRC

■ Although both organizations have like goals, Nike argues the Fair Labor Association has more reasonable protocol

By Ben Romano
Oregon Daily Emerald

Nike weighed in on the issue of labor rights monitoring agencies Monday in no uncertain terms.

The apparel industry giant clearly endorses the Fair Labor Association, an organization with stated goals similar to those of the Worker Rights Consortium, which the University recently joined.

A statement released late Monday announced that Nike CEO Phil Knight will halt all future personal donations to the University. Knight said that the WRC "has no protocols, no credibility, no role for the companies whose businesses are being monitored and no independence."

Earlier Nike statements have lambasted the WRC calling it "a loosely formed organization whose operating tenets include a 'gotcha monitoring' system and an ambiguous living wage provision."

The company made its position on the WRC clear late in March when it pulled out of a contract with Brown University, one of the founding members of the WRC. After the Rhode Island liberal arts school stipulated that all of its

trademark licensees comply with the code of conduct of the WRC, Nike stopped supplying Brown's hockey teams with equipment.

In a letter to the Brown community dated March 28, Nike decried the WRC for excluding some parties from the negotiating table: "We fundamentally believe that

the only effective way to make progress in improving factory conditions around the world is to have all stakeholders at the table. The WRC directly rejects this premise, choosing instead to exclude industry and other key stakeholders."

Nike is participating in — and loudly endorsing — the FLA, a product of the Apparel Industry Partnership, which is a group of manufacturers, universities and consumer, labor and human rights organizations, started by the White House in 1996.

The FLA allows industry representatives on its board of directors. It also allows companies to pick

their own monitors, and factory monitoring visits are pre-announced.

Those who are pulling for the WRC as the factory monitoring organization of choice criticize the FLA for letting the garment industry monitor itself.

"I'm sure that there were no Nazis on the Nuremberg war tribunal," said Randy Newnham, a spokesman for the Human Rights Alliance campus organization. He said he doesn't think that clothing manufacturers have a right to be at the table.

Because of the FLA's structure and monitoring, groups like the HRA lend it no credence.

"Basically, this is just a PR stunt of the garment industry and the Clinton administration," Newnham said.

The WRC is not free from criticism either, however.

The New York-based group has been criticized for blocking media from attending its inaugural meeting April 7.

Others have problems with the WRC's board member selection process and the amount of influence that universities will have. Critics have also noted that the WRC, with no business representation at all, is imbalanced.



Excerpts from Nike CEO Phil Knight's statement regarding the University

In recent days, there have been numerous media reports and speculation regarding my personal philanthropy and relationship with the University of Oregon. As a lifelong Duck and in fairness to the many alums at Nike and around Oregon, I feel obligated to address this personally.

I was shocked on Friday morning, April 14 at 9 a.m. to find out that the University of Oregon had joined the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC). With this move, the University inserted itself into the new global economy where I make my living — and inserted itself on the wrong side, fumbling a teachable moment.

Nike did not invent the global econ-

omy but has been determined to be a leader and to show its good citizenship. We are very, very serious about providing good factory working conditions and continuously improving the work experience for all 500,000 people who make Nike products. We also have been consistent in calling for one strong external code and one monitoring system for the entire industry that puts us all on a level playing field. We believe the president's and the Department of Labor's Fair Labor Association (FLA), representing a coalition of human, consumer and labor rights groups, industry and universities, is such a system although it is taking too long to get active....

No university, including the Univer-

sity of Oregon, can meet the WRC living wage and other code standards for food service employees, grounds keepers, clerical personnel or teaching assistants.

My history with the University of Oregon goes back a long way. ... Nike will honor its contractual commitment. But for me personally, there will be no further donations of any kind to the University of Oregon. At this time, this is not a situation that can be resolved. The bonds of trust, which allowed me to give at a high level, have been shredded.

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Knight

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and administrators will meet within the next few days to discuss possible changes to the expansion project.

Knight, a University alumnus who noted in his statement that he has personally donated \$50 million to athletic and academic programs in the years since his 1959 graduation, said, "Nike has a lot of pride and has been my life. It is the source of any dollars I am able to give. To accept the University of Oregon's endorsement of the WRC would be to place my company, our employees, our university-related manufacturers and their employees in unknown hands and under undefined monitoring that has no protocols, no credibility, no role for the companies whose businesses are being monitored and no independence."

Nike and Knight have endorsed the Fair Labor Association, a monitoring agency similar to the WRC with a mission to improve working conditions in its factories. The fundamental difference between the two is that the FLA has six apparel industry representatives on its 14-member board of directors while the WRC allows no industry

Knight's University ties and donations

1959 — Knight graduates.

1996 — The Oregon Campaign, started in 1992 to increase private gift support, nears the initial \$150 million goal when Knight donates \$25 million.

Dec. 31, 1998 — The Oregon Campaign ends, with \$253 million raised; Knight's donation is the largest one announced.

Nov. 1999 — Knight reportedly pledges \$30 million to the University's \$80 million plan to renovate Autzen Stadium.

April 12, 2000 — Frohnmayer signs University on with the Worker Rights Consortium, a labor-monitoring organization.

April 19 — Rumors begin that Knight has pulled private donations to the University.

Monday — Knight officially confirms that he is ending all future donations; in a released statement he says that he has given \$50 million to the University.

SOURCES: Oregon Campaign Yearbook and Emerald archives

participation in decision making. The University's apparel contract with Nike — the licensing

agreement that puts "Swoosh" logos on Duck uniforms — will not be affected by Knight's announcement. The contract expires in the spring of 2003.

"Nike will honor its contractual commitment," Knight said.

University President Dave Frohnmayer released a statement shortly after Knight's announcement.

"We are very disappointed to hear that he plans to curtail future contributions to the University of Oregon," Frohnmayer said.

Early Monday, the University administration was trying to set up a face-to-face discussion between Frohnmayer and Knight to resolve the matter between the two principle players, whose relationship has been characterized as a friendship.

"I still hope to speak with him in person, and look forward to working with him in the future," Frohnmayer said.

Knight indicated that future relations with the University may be strained at best.

"At this time, this is not a situation that can be resolved," Knight said. "The bonds of trust, which allowed me to give at a high level, have been shredded."

Emerald reporter Mirjam Swanson contributed to this article.

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4:00 pm, Gerlinger Lounge

Daphne Scholinski
What's all the LOCO-motion?: Art, Sanity, and Gender
7:00 pm, Gerlinger Lounge

Kate Sullivan
Brown-bag Presentation
TransGendering Monstrosity
12:00 pm. LGBTQA, Suite 34, EMU

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