

Why I Rejected the Reebok Human Rights Award

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The driving forces of globalisation are the movement and expansion of capital and technology, through multinational companies. Globalisation, some people argue, has contributed a lot to the creation of a new world, with a global welfare and justice for all.

But in practice, globalisation is producing neither universal welfare nor global peace. On the contrary, in reality, globalisation has divided the world into two sides, which are antagonistic towards each other. There are wealthy creditors and bankrupt debtors, there are super rich countries and underdeveloped countries, super wealthy speculators and impoverished malnourished children. Globalisation intensifies, not a higher paid and a better life for workers in the third world, but the growing gap between the rich and the poor.

And this also happens in Indonesia, among Indonesian workers who work in multinational shoes companies, including Reebok.

In November last year, I was informed that I was selected as one of the awardees of the annual Reebok Human Rights Award program and ceremony. The Reebok Human Rights Foundation then has officially announced the names of the awardees.

I have taken this award into a very deep consideration. We finally decide not to accept this. On the one hand, this is a kind of recognition of the struggle and the hard work that we have done for years. But on the other hand, we are very conscious of the condition of the Reebok workers from the third world countries, such as in Indonesia, Mexico, China, Thailand, Brazil and Vietnam. As a trade union, we strongly put a lot of pressure to achieve what every worker deserves: higher wages, better working conditions and a brighter future for their children.

In Indonesia, there are five Reebok companies. 80% of the workers are women. All companies are sub-contracted, often by the South Korean companies such as Dung Jo and Tong Yang. Since the workers can only get around \$1.5 a day, they then have to live in a slum area, surrounded by poor and unhealthy conditions, especially for their children. At the same time, Reebok collected millions of dollars of profit every year, directly contributed by these workers.

The low pay and exploitation of the workers of Indonesia, Mexico and Vietnam are the main reasons why we will not accept this award. Some of our members in the union work in companies producing Reebok shoes.

The decision I have made is not merely based on data, report, statistics or assumptions. In 1995, I was arrested and tortured by the police, after leading a strike of 5000 workers of Indoshoes Inti Industry. They demanded an increase of their wages (they were paid only US\$1 for working 8 hours a day), and maternity leave as well. This company operated in West Java, and produced shoes of Reebok and Adidas. I have seen for my self how the company treat the workers, and used the police to repress the strikers.

We believe that accepting the award is not a proper or a right thing to do. This is part of the consequences of our work to help workers improve their life. We cannot tolerate the way multinational companies treat the workers of the third world countries. And we surely hope that our stand can make a contribution to help changing the labor condition in Reebok-produced companies.

P.S.

* From Counter Punch:

<http://www.counterpunch.org/ditasari.html>

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