



Dear Caroline Rush and the British Fashion Council,

As a coalition of Uyghur advocacy groups and workers rights organisations, we are imploring the British Fashion Council (BFC) to call out the industry’s complicity in Uyghur forced labour.

Forced labour and the fashion industry

It is widely accepted that the fashion industry has an extensive forced labour problem. Approximately 20% of the world’s cotton is made in the Uyghur Region (so-called Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region), an area ubiquitous for coercing Uyghur workers into forced labour schemes, known as ‘vocational education and training programmes’. The UN’s Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery has found that, “the nature and extent of powers exercised over [Uyghur] workers during forced labour, including excessive surveillance, abusive living and working conditions, restriction of movement through internment, threats, physical and/or sexual violence and other inhuman or degrading treatment... **may amount to enslavement as a crime against humanity.**”

The UN’s landmark assessment of human rights in the Uyghur region urged the business community to take tangible action to rid their supply chains of Uyghur forced labour. We note that the BFC has shown some commitment to addressing the ‘adverse environmental and social impact’ of the fashion industry. In particular, we welcome your code of conduct prohibiting members of the community from ‘using or benefiting from slavery, servitude, forced or compulsory labour, child labour or human trafficking – whether directly or within your supply chain (if applicable)’. Despite these steps, we remain concerned that your approach is failing to befit the severity of the crisis.

Hugo Boss

In light of this, we are concerned about your decision to allow Hugo Boss, a company implicated in Uyghur forced labour practices, to host London Fashion Week’s opening party. Although Hugo Boss’ event has been cancelled due to Queen Elizabeth’s passing, we still feel compelled to share our concerns over Boss’ human rights record, in the hope that it will prevent future collaborations.

As you may be aware, Hugo Boss’ clothing is manufactured by the Esquel Group, an entity with a significant subsidiary in the Uyghur Region, now sanctioned by the US government. Reports suggest that all of Esquel’s cotton ginning may take place in the Uyghur region.

Hugo Boss company relies on internal audits of its facilities in the Uyghur Region showing no evidence of forced labour. However, the Better Cotton Initiative (which Hugo Boss is a member of) stopped all reviews in the region in October 2020 due to “an increasingly untenable operating environment”. The inadequacy of these audits was confirmed earlier this year, when researchers at the Agroisolab found traces of cotton from the Uyghur region in Hugo Boss tops using isotope analysis.

In March 2021, Hugo Boss made a statement on their official Weibo account that it would continue to buy cotton from the Uyghur region due to respect for China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Whilst Boss later stated that the Weibo statement was not "authorised", it raises key concerns about Hugo Boss' continued use of cotton made in the Uyghur Region to maintain relations with China.

Given the public nature of these accusations, we would like to know more about the British Fashion Council's process for scrutinising the human rights records of brands that are affiliated with London Fashion Week. In particular, we would like to know what information you ask organisations to provide proving that their conduct does not violate your own code of conduct on modern slavery?

Moving Forward

Stop Uyghur Genocide is calling on the BFC to meet with the signatories of this letter to discuss how leading industry bodies can up their standards on modern slavery.

In particular, the meeting would provide an opportunity for the BFC to seek consultation on developing a more comprehensive human rights framework on forced labour. A framework of this kind would likely compel the BFC to carry out due diligence on affiliated brands' attachment to the Uyghur Region (through tools such as the [Uyghur Forced Labour Database](#)) and ask companies to provide intel on their human rights standards. In particular, we would recommend you join the Coalition to End Uyghur Forced Labour in asking:

1. Is the company applying a single global standard, in alignment with the Coalition's [Call to Action](#), to exclude Uyghur forced labour across its supply chains, and to not bifurcate its supply chains?
2. If the company imports goods into the US and must comply with the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA), is the company committed to not re-exporting goods detained under the auspices of the UFLPA to other markets?
3. If the company is committed to the above statements, how is it implementing these commitments?
4. If the company is not committed to a single global standard, how is it ensuring that goods imported into markets other than the US are not tainted?

A meeting between the British Fashion Council, the Uyghur community and ethical labour advocates would send a clear message that the British Fashion Council is no longer accepting complacency around modern slavery. As an industry body known for its dynamism and resilience, we believe action from the BFC's has the potential to radically reform the status quo. But the time to act is now.

Yours sincerely,

Stop Uyghur Genocide
World Uyghur Congress
Campaign for Uyghurs
Freedom United
Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP)
Yet Again
Students for Uyghurs
Sum Of Us
Jewish Movement for Uyghur Freedom
No Business with Genocide
René Cassin, the Jewish Voice for Human Rights
UK Uyghur Community