

**Subject:** New guide supports companies in upholding freedom of association  
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## **PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Friday 26 July 2013**

### **New guide supports companies in upholding freedom of association**

The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) has launched a guide to support companies uphold the right to freedom of association within their supply chains.

ETI developed ‘Freedom of association in company supply chains: a practical guide’ in recognition of a current lack of clear, practical guidance for companies tackling this issue in their global supply chains. It draws on ETI’s experience of supporting members with freedom of association and collective bargaining.

Freedom of association is the right for workers and employers to establish and join trade unions of their own choosing, without prior authorisation and interference from government or from one another. This right is enshrined in both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Labour Organisation conventions, and is a central clause in ETI’s internationally recognised Base Code of labour practice.

ETI Head of Programmes, Debbie Coulter, said: “We recognise that companies often grapple with the practicalities of freedom of association in complex international supply chains. This guide provides concrete steps to help them uphold workers’ right to freely join or form trade unions, including establishing a policy, understanding local labour laws and setting up monitoring systems.”

The guide includes tools that companies can use as part of the auditing process; for example making sure that auditing teams include someone with experience of labour and trade union affairs and that they hold face-to-face interviews with workers. But it also shows why companies need to go beyond a compliance approach, highlighting the importance of strong, ongoing relationships with suppliers, trade unions and NGOs.

Debbie Coulter said: “The recently introduced UN Guiding Principles on

Business and Human Rights place clear expectations on companies to uphold human rights in their supply chains. This guide looks at how companies can meet these expectations from a freedom of association perspective, for example by undertaking supply chain due diligence, and establishing effective complaints and remediation processes. We hope it proves to be a valuable resource for companies across all sectors.”

‘Freedom of association in company supply chains: a practical guide’ also includes case studies on setting up worker hotlines in China, dealing with institutional corruption in Mexico and the challenges of state-controlled unions in China and Vietnam. It is free to download from the [resources section of ETI’s website](#)

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