

Brussels
13 May 2020

To:
Mr Phil Hogan, Commissioner for Trade
Mr Josep Borrell, High Representative/Vice-President

Subject: Malpractices in PPE supply chain in Malaysia during Covid-19 crisis

Honourable Commissioner Hogan,
Honourable High Representative Borrell,

It has come to our attention that the EU delegation in Malaysia has approached the Ministry of Trade and Industry in its letter dated 25th March 2020, urging the Government of Malaysia to ramp up supply and manufacturing of medical gloves using “creative” measures such as 24/7 production.

We are fully aware that COVID-19 pandemic is a severe public health emergency and a major economic shock that affects all of us, and of a need for coordinated action to ensure the availability of personal protective equipment. We cannot, however, turn a blind eye to the working conditions of the workers who produce this equipment.

During the hearing of the Committee of International Trade, Commissioner Phil Hogan said that *“if there is evidence with certainty of any malpractice in relation to labour laws, we are happy to hear it and investigate it”*.

Worryingly, the letter from the Ambassador Maria Castille Fernandez fails to raise worker protection issues, amid systemic and documented forced labour concerns in the industry that the EU is already well familiar with. Illegal recruitment fees, long hours, low pay, passport confiscation and squalid, overcrowded accommodation are commonplace. Such conditions leave workers, who are often foreign workers from countries such as Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal, vulnerable to forced labour and debt bondage, which are modern forms of slavery. Furthermore, reports from glove factories suggest that employers have failed to provide adequate health protection to their workers.

Therefore, we call on the EU to use its leverage to address the situation.

This could be done by strengthening supply chain checks, and to support manufacturers to

ensure they adhere to Covid-19 health and safety norms, to protect workers on the factory floor and in their accommodations. For this purpose, the EU should undertake inspections and audits in factories that the EU is purchasing Covid-19 items from.

We also call for the EU delegation in Malaysia, in line with the Commission/High Representative Joint Communication and EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, to strengthen engagement with the Malaysian authorities on responsible business conduct, and support them to implement the UN guiding principles on business and human rights, including through developing a national action plan and relevant due diligence guidelines.

Respectfully,

Heidi Hautala, Greens/EFA

Pascal Durand, Renew

Anna Cavazzini, Greens/EFA

Manon Aubry, GUE/NGL

Maria Arena, S&D

Aurore Lalucq, S&D

Sirpa Pietikäinen, EPP