

PRESS STATEMENT: ISSUED BY SAVE JOBS COALITION

SAVE REX TRUEFORM CAMPAIGN

The recently announced closure of Rex Trueform's Salt River plant threatens to put another 1000 people out of work in the Western Cape and to bring the clothing, textile and leather industries one step closer to complete collapse. These sectors have been hemorrhaging jobs at an alarming rate, with approximately 100 000 formal jobs in the past 10 years, 17 000 in the past 12 months alone, and 800 during the first month of this year.

Every family on the Cape Flats has a member who at one time or another has worked for Rex Trueform. Every family in South Africa who has bought formal wear for their fathers and sons has proudly worn the products made by the workers of Rex Trueform. Now, we are told that imports from sweatshop economies are cheaper than the labour of our women workers. Even after twenty years of service, a qualified machinist at Rex Trueform earns R520.00 per week.

Such statistics are particularly ominous in the context of our national unemployment crisis, which has left over 40% of economically active adults without jobs (based on the expanded definition of unemployment). A recent skills audit conducted by the Clothing, Textile, and

Leather Footwear SETA shows that almost 70% of employees in the industry are women. In Dimbaza in the Eastern cape, which is one of the poorest communities in our country, the clothing industry has been virtually wiped out. The industry in that area employs less than 800 workers whereas, three years ago, it provided approximately 6000 clothing industry jobs. In this area, a qualified machinist earns R 282 per week making the clothing industry one of the lowest paid manufacturing industries in South Africa. But statistics alone do not reveal the full scope of the tragedy. Each dismissed worker supports, on average, five other household members. Shopkeepers and merchants, too, rely for their own livelihoods on the consumptive spending of workers.

The decline of the clothing and textile industry undermines the prosperity and dignity not only of individual households, but also of entire communities. Women shoulder a disproportionate share of this burden, as they comprise the vast majority of clothing and textile workers. The sector's troubles are due in large measure to unfair international trade rules that put profits before people. In an effort to boost super profits, transnational companies and their allies promote "free" market policies that facilitate the exploitation of both labour and markets. They seek to eliminate tariffs on trade and other mechanisms that ensure fair labour practices and development in emerging markets. Instead, they insist that capital be allowed to move unimpeded around the world in search of the lowest-cost labour, whilst the cheap goods produced enjoy access to any market, undercutting local producers.

These forces, together with the sustained strengthening of the Rand, and fast tracked tariff reductions at a rate quicker than that required by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) have caused South Africa's clothing and footwear markets to be flooded with relatively inexpensive goods made by Chinese workers under sweatshop conditions. A recent investigation by the BBC showed that in China most clothing and textile workers earn less than R200.00 per week for 15 hours a day with one day's leave per month. No family in China, India or anywhere should suffer such exploitation and unfair labour practices. No person who supports dignity, equality and fairness should buy products made by labour under these conditions, especially when they destroy jobs in poor communities in South Africa and elsewhere. At Queenspark, a subsidiary of Rex Trueform, a large quantity of the store's stock comes from China.

It is time to act to save our jobs and our communities! For almost two years, The South African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (SACTWU) has been working to negotiate a procurement agreement with retailers such as Woolworths, Truworths, Edgars and Foschinis that would require them to ensure that all suppliers comply with fair labour standards and would commit them to buying a certain proportion of their goods from local manufacturers. South Africa's largest retailers, however, have moved to block such an agreement in an effort to protect their profits. Ironically, the Southern African Labour Research Institute (SALRI) estimates that over the past three years alone, Truworths, Woolworths, Edcon and Mr. Price have amassed super profits of approximately R8,3 billion. COSATU, the SA Council of Churches and their affiliates, as allies in the "Save the Jobs Campaign", stand with the workers of Rex Trueform, their families and with the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU). We support Western Cape Premier Ebrahim Rasool and all other community leaders who have pledged support to stop the closure of Rex Trueform. We call on all concerned citizens from whatever background of culture, race and religion to join in a rally outside Rex Trueform on 23 March 2005. At the same time the Western Cape Provincial Council of Churches pledges the support of its leaders and members to raise public awareness of the clothing and textile workers' plight and the local impact of the global trade regime, to sponsor public education events, distribute information about economic policy and job losses, and provide appropriate pastoral support to textile workers and their families.

Furthermore, we call upon: The management of Rex Trueform to explore with SACTWU other business options that would avoid the closure of the Salt River plant and the loss of 1000 jobs; The management and shareholders of Rex Trueform to commit to source at least 75% of their goods from local manufacturers who obey the labour laws and uphold the Constitution of our country; The retailers such as Woolworths, Truworths, Edgars and Foschini to commit to boycotting sweatshop-produced goods and buying at least 75% of their inventory from local manufacturers and to sign a Code at NEDLAC that commits to 75% local procurement; The retailers and their board members to consider a meeting with faith leaders to discuss and consider a process that will lead to the signing of a Code of Agreement at NEDLAC; The South African government to immediately implement the safeguards to defend the clothing and textile industry from unfair competition and to mobilize other developing nations within the World Trade Organisation to demand fairer trade policies;

* All community organizations to join the Save Jobs Coalition; and

* All people to support the Save Rex Rally on 23 March 2005 Statement ends

For more information please contact:

COSATU: Tony Ehrenreich, Secretary General, Western Cape: 021-448 0045
SACTWU: Wayne van der Rhee, National Organising Secretary: 021-447 4570
SA Council of Churches (SACC), (Rev.) Keith Vermeulen, Director,
Parliamentary Office: 021-423 4261/072 482 5524
Western Cape Provincial Council of Churches (WCPCC), (Rev.) Bonyisile
Mdeyesha, Chairperson, 083 338 3012
Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), Zackie Achmat, Director: 083 467 1152

(As CSO's and NPO's decide to join the Coalition, details will be made available in due course.)

SA Council of Churches
Keith Vermeulen
Director: Parliamentary Office
kavern@sacc.org.za <mailto:kavern@sacc.org.za>
Church House
1 Queen Victoria Street
Cape Town
W. Cape 8001
Rep. of South Africa
tel: 21-423 4261
fax: 21-423 4262
mobile: 72 482 5524
www.sacc-ct.org.za

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