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***Global Fairness Initiative, Salvadoran Government promote competitiveness through improved labor rights - National Workshop addresses labor rights, employment, and economic competitiveness.***

Washington D.C., July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2008-- GFI in partnership with the Government of El Salvador's Ministry of Labor and the U.S. Department of Labor's Comply and Win project convened the National Labor Rights, Employment and Competitiveness Workshop on June 26, 2008.

Participants, in addition to government officials from El Salvador and the U.S. included, international textile and apparel companies, local worker representatives, employers, and civil society organizations.

In opening remarks, Salvadoran Minister of Labor Roberto Espinal declared that, "The Ministry of Labor is convinced that through compromise, tolerance, and mutual respect, together we can build a foundation of healthy labor relations that contributes to the socio-economic development of El Salvador."

El Salvador's Labor Inspector Javier Rodriguez stated that "strengthening the labor inspectorate and developing preventative mechanisms for labor challenges would lead to improved economic growth and increased employment." Columbia Sportswear's Corporate Responsibility Manager Edgar Huezo cited labor rights as "an important component of sourcing and investment criteria for apparel companies that purchase products from Central America."

The unprecedented workshop gathered representatives from several social and economic sectors in an engagement process that resulted in a commitment by all to improve the culture of compliance in El Salvador's textile and apparel industry. Nearly 200 participants representing over twenty different organizations, demonstrated the significant role that labor compliance plays not only in maintaining El Salvador's textile and apparel industry but also in spurring its expansion through improved competitiveness.

GFI's Executive Director Stan Byers announced: "The June 26<sup>th</sup> workshop will be the first in a series of events hosted by the Ministry that would utilize a multi-stakeholder engagement process to develop sustainable solutions to the challenges El Salvador's garment and textile industry faces. This workshop is part of a larger GFI regional initiative designed to help extend the benefits of CAFTA to marginalized workers and producers.

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NOTE: To learn more about The Global Fairness Initiative please visit [www.globalfairness.org](http://www.globalfairness.org) or contact [wsimon@globalfairness.org](mailto:wsimon@globalfairness.org).

*Founded in 2002, the Global Fairness Initiative (GFI) aims to change the global poverty cycle and enable market-based solutions in the agriculture and textiles sectors that directly benefit the world's poorest workers and producers. With the belief that equal economic opportunity for the poor and marginalized promotes stability and security for all, and that the sustainability of our globalized world is dependent on a fair distribution of its benefits and challenges, GFI blends the best of locally-based solutions for high engagement in a competitive global marketplace.*