

## CALL FOR SOLIDARITY WITH ARGENTINIAN FRIENDS OF WORKERS – GUSTAVO VERA AND LA ALAMEDA ATTACKED AFTE

Tuesday, 14 July 2009

Background: Gustavo Vera and at least seven other activists from La Alameda in Buenos Aires, Argentina, were attacked and wounded on July 10 after they went with journalists to free workers and their families from a secret garment sweatshop they had earlier identified. The workers and family were able to leave with their belongings while the inspectors from the city's labour department stayed inside. Within minutes arrived "Alfredo Ayala" who identified himself as "a representative of the Bolivian community", who called by phone to "send me more people", and then in less than ten minutes up to a hundred men had gathered, and when the TV cameras of the reporters who were accompanying Gustavo had left, those men began to attack Gustavo and his companions from La Alameda – while two policemen diverted traffic and the chief of the operation said that there were no more personnel to send.

While the attackers ran off, Gustavo Vera was brutally attacked and had to be taken out from the crowd by the police. Five wounded were taken to the hospital and various companions of La Alameda giving statements in police station No. 40, two blocks from the sweatshop.

(<http://laretaguardiaam770.blogspot.com/>)

Gustavo now has 7 stitches in the head, a swollen face, a bandaged arm. He said he's glad they could bring the workers out and they are now safely at La Alameda. But don't ask where the secretary for human rights or for assistance to victims of trafficking are, he said, because he hasn't seen them.

Many of us in AMRC, ATNC Network and other groups in Hong Kong and rest of Asia met Gustavo Vera in meetings in Thailand and Hong Kong in March 2009, when Asian countries were already many months into worsening financial and economic crisis and rising food and oil prices. He shared with us the experience of workers under Argentina's financial crisis in 2001 and their strategies for empowerment and survival. /He also shared how his organization La Alameda grew from a popular assembly to include a worker-run cooperative and now keeps defending workers' rights by exposing and helping workers where mainstream unions often don't reach - trafficked migrant workers in hidden sweatshops, trafficked sex workers, plantations where even children are forced to work.

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/Since then, much more news has been reported about the July 10 attack situation. Some of that news says:

- there were 20 machines and at least 10 people living in the small sweatshop
- the daughter of one, a girl of 15, was abused by the owner
- two of the workers had been trafficked in directly from Bolivia to this sweatshop just two weeks ago
- the sweatshop made bags and clothes for a garment shop owned by Koreans (but note, the Korean was the final purchaser and also the retailer in Argentina)
- the sweatshop was closed last year after an exposure protest but for some reason continued producing
- the workers and people were kept enclosed in horrible living conditions, dirty, poor food, exposed cables, toilet in terrible state
- they had to work from 7 a.m. to 23 p.m.
- the workers were paid US\$0.92 per bag produced

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/La Alameda wants the Subsecretary of Labour of the city to make a full

investigation of the sweatshop's situation, close the sweatshop immediately, sue the owner for violating the law on homebased work, the law on trafficking, and for reduction to servitude and trafficking in persons. Extensive charges brought against the owner of the brand 'Susana L' and the victims should be immediately given adequate assistance. So far the victims are being taken care of by La Alameda.

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/\_\*What you can do:

\*\_1. Please read the below statement and give your organization/name if you wish to support!

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/2. La Alameda requests donation for a carriage or two for the baby and a marriage bed. These materials are destined for the families that were freed from the sweatshop. They need it urgently until they receive help from the city or national government.

3. Organize an action at the Argentine Consulate in your country. Inform us if you will do so - may//be our groups can do on a single date!

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Regards

Doris

{DRAFT LETTER TO ARGENTINA AUTHORITIES FROM ASIAN WORKER GROUPS}

Att: Argentina Consulate in HK

1210 Jardine House, 1 Connaught Road Central, Hong Kong Special

Administrative Region, People's Republic of China

Tel: (852) 2523 3208 Fax: (852) 2877 0906

Attn: Cancilleria Argentina

Ministro Jorge Taiana

Jefe de Gobierno de la Ciudad Mauricio Macri

Presidente Cristina Kirchner

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Esmeralda 1212, C1007ABR, Buenos Aires, Argentina - Tel. +54 (11) 4819-7000

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

It was brought to our attention that Gustavo Vera and at least seven other activists from La Alameda in Buenos Aires, Argentina, were attacked and wounded last night (July 10) after they went with journalists to free workers and their families from a secret garment sweatshop they had earlier identified. Though police were not far away, they did not do the job of protecting people who are working on behalf of all Argentinians to expose gross exploitation and enslavement of workers in hidden sweatshops, for the profits of heartless companies that fail to bear full responsibility.

La Alameda and Gustavo Vera have been working tirelessly and relentlessly for many years on behalf of workers and against slavery, and in recent months have made great media exposures of networks of prostitution, of places disguised as bars, where women were found to have been victims of trafficking, including minors. They exposed these with the help of the cartoneros, with hidden cameras. They exposed the use of dangerous chemicals in drycleaner chains owned by the sister of politician Michetti. They have continually been working with formerly entrapped migrant Bolivian workers rescuing other workers from hidden sweatshops where they often have been trafficked in and kept to work for long hours, low pay, and atrocious living conditions.

In Asia as well workers are forced to work long hours, with exposure to health problems and often sexual harassment, and with no protection from their national police, but rather often the terrorism and harassment of their own police and of hired thugs, for their attempts to assert their rights as workers.

We met Gustavo Vera in meetings in Thailand and Hong Kong in March 2009, when Asian countries were already many months into worsening financial and economic crisis and rising food and oil prices. He shared with us the experience of workers under Argentina's financial crisis in 2001 and their strategies for empowerment and survival.

We applaud and appreciate his strong sense of solidarity with workers and constant struggle to raise the rights and living standards of all workers regardless of origin. This is true international solidarity.

We were horrified and outraged to hear of the attack that happened on July 10 to Gustavo Vera and La Alameda members. We strongly condemn the thugs who attacked Gustavo and his companions of La Alameda in such a cowardly way immediately after they carried out the necessary and important work of rescuing workers from slave labour and exposing this scourge of the country which ends up profiting large companies. We also strongly question the role of the police, and urge that the police of the city and of the country make a full investigation. We urge the police and the government to ensure that the criminals who carried out the attacks are found and punished, and that Gustavo Vera and the other members of La Alameda are given medical care and protection from further attacks.

/We also support the demands of La Alameda for the victims of trafficking whom they rescued. We strongly urge that the city and national government take responsibility by immediately making a full investigation of the sweatshop's situation, closing the sweatshop immediately, and suing the owner for violating the law on homebased work, the law on trafficking, and for reduction to servitude and trafficking in persons. Charges should be brought against the owner of the brand 'Susana L' and the victims should be immediately given adequate assistance. /

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1210 Jardine House, 1 Connaught Road Central, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, People's Republic of China

Tel: (852) 2523 3208 Fax: (852) 2877 0906

Attn: Cancilleria Argentina

Ministro Jorge Taiana

Jefe de Gobierno de la Ciudad Mauricio Macri

Presidente Cristina Kirchner

\*\*

Esmeralda 1212, C1007ABR, Buenos Aires, Argentina - Tel. +54 (11) 4819-7000

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

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La Alameda and Gustavo Vera have been working tirelessly and relentlessly for many years on behalf of workers and against slavery, and in recent months have made great media exposures of networks of prostitution, of places disguised as bars, where women were found to have been victims of trafficking, including minors. They exposed these with the help of the cartoneros, with hidden cameras. They exposed the

use of dangerous chemicals in drycleaner chains owned by the sister of politician Michetti. They have continually been working with formerly entrapped migrant Bolivian workers rescuing other workers from hidden sweatshops where they often have been trafficked in and kept to work for long hours, low pay, and atrocious living conditions.

In Asia as well workers are forced to work long hours, with exposure to health problems and often sexual harassment, and with no protection from their national police, but rather often the terrorism and harassment of their own police and of hired thugs, for their attempts to assert their rights as workers.

We met Gustavo Vera in meetings in Thailand and Hong Kong in March 2009, when Asian countries were already many months into worsening financial and economic crisis and rising food and oil prices. He shared with us the experience of workers under Argentina's financial crisis in 2001 and their strategies for empowerment and survival.

We applaud and appreciate his strong sense of solidarity with workers and constant struggle to raise the rights and living standards of all workers regardless of origin. This is true international solidarity.

We were horrified and outraged to hear of the attack that happened on July 10 to Gustavo Vera and La Alameda members. We strongly condemn the thugs who attacked Gustavo and his companions of La Alameda in such a cowardly way immediately after they carried out the necessary and important work of rescuing workers from slave labour and exposing this scourge of the country which ends up profiting large companies. We also strongly question the role of the police, and urge that the police of the city and of the country make a full investigation. We urge the police and the government to ensure that the criminals who carried out the attacks are found and punished, and that Gustavo Vera and the other members of La Alameda are given medical care and protection from further attacks.

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With all solidarity from Asia While the attackers ran off, Gustavo Vera was brutally attacked and had to be taken out from the crowd by the police. Five wounded were taken to the hospital and various companions of La Alameda giving statements in police station No. 40, two blocks from the sweatshop.  
(<http://laretaguardiaam770.blogspot.com/>)

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- there were 20 machines and at least 10 people living in the small sweatshop
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{DRAFT LETTER TO ARGENTINA AUTHORITIES FROM ASIAN WORKER GROUPS}

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Administrative Region, People's Republic of China

Tel: (852) 2523 3208 Fax: (852) 2877 0906

Attn: Cancilleria Argentina

Ministro Jorge Taiana

Jefe de Gobierno de la Ciudad Mauricio Macri

Presidente Cristina Kirchner

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Esmeralda 1212, C1007ABR, Buenos Aires, Argentina - Tel. +54 (11) 4819-7000

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La Alameda and Gustavo Vera have been working tirelessly and relentlessly for many years on behalf of workers and against slavery, and in recent months have made great media exposures of networks of prostitution, of places disguised as bars, where women were found to have been victims of trafficking, including minors. They exposed these with the help of the cartoneros, with hidden cameras. They exposed the use of dangerous chemicals in drycleaner chains owned by the sister of politician Michetti. They have continually been working with formerly entrapped migrant Bolivian workers rescuing other workers from hidden sweatshops where they often have been trafficked in and kept to work for long hours, low pay, and atrocious living conditions.

In Asia as well workers are forced to work long hours, with exposure to health problems and often sexual harassment, and with no protection from their national police, but rather often the terrorism and harassment of their own police and of hired thugs, for their attempts to assert their rights as workers.

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We were horrified and outraged to hear of the attack that happened on July 10 to Gustavo Vera and La Alameda members. We strongly condemn the thugs who attacked Gustavo and his companions of La Alameda in such a

cowardly way immediately after they carried out the necessary and important work of rescuing workers from slave labour and exposing this scourge of the country which ends up profiting large companies. We also strongly question the role of the police, and urge that the police of the city and of the country make a full investigation. We urge the police and the government to ensure that the criminals who carried out the attacks are found and punished, and that Gustavo Vera and the other members of La Alameda are given medical care and protection from further attacks.

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