

TOP GLOVE LEADS THE WAY IN WORKERS' WELFARE

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Top Glove committed to be the best in health and safety

Top Glove Corp Bhd can be a model example on labour and housing issues among foreign workers in Malaysia after it said areas that were under dispute on allegations of forced labour have now been resolved.

The world's largest rubber glove maker is also taking proactive steps in making sure it is in compliance with local laws pertaining to foreign worker accommodation as it comprehensively deals with the subject on the treatment and housing of its foreign labour.

The swiftness in improving and addressing the labour concerns raised by the United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is impressive. After investigations towards the end of August last year, all the 11 International Labour Organization (ILO) indicators of forced labour are now categorised as “green”; which indicates full resolution of the forced labour indicators.

This has been verified by independent international UK consultant, Impactt Ltd (Impactt) on April 22,2021.

Top Glove managing director Datuk Lee Kim Meow said: “Our resounding global success is largely credited to our committed 22,000 employees. While we achieved many new milestones in 2020, it was also a year for valuable lessons learned. Nonetheless, we have remained positive and even more committed to taking care of all of our people and are continuously working hard towards upgrading our practices and initiatives in this area.”

Top Glove engaged Impactt in July 2020 as an independent consultant specialising in ethical trade practices, human rights, and labour practices with specific experience of remedying these issues in Malaysia. In reaching all green indicators in Top Glove’s labour practices, what the company has done was not only implement corrective measures to issues that have been flagged, but in a way, it has also adopted a new corporate culture when it comes to labour practices of its staff.

“We have always been committed to doing well, so that we can continue to do good. We have changed and understand that there are areas where we can do better, and have been making swift, concerted efforts towards doing just that, so that we can be an employer of choice for all employees, local and foreign,” added Lee.

Independent Migrant Worker Rights Specialist Andy Hall, a vocal critic of worker conditions at Top Glove but who has recently adopted a “critical friend” approach to the company, said: “It is time to acknowledge the positive momentum forward shown by Top Glove’s leadership to effectively remediate forced labour indicators from the company’s direct operations and supply chain.

“I look forward to working together with Top Glove to ensure the rights and welfare of migrant workers are continually prioritised within the company’s direct operations and its vast supply chain.

“I hope to also work with Top Glove to ensure the company is a leading figure promoting environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) in corporate activities in Malaysia, ” he said.

Dealing with the issues at hand meant that Top Glove had spent RM150mil on the migrant workers remediation package and tackled 11 main indicators involving allegations of forced labour.

The sincerity of Top Glove’s actions also extended to ensuring compliance with Act 446: Employees’ Minimum Standards of Housing, Accommodations and Amenities Act 1990 in Malaysia.

“Although it has presented some challenges in the industry in finding suitable accommodation, we take it as an opportunity to not only meet these requirements but to do even better for our employees. Aside from ensuring adherence to the occupant to space ratio, we look at various other ways to provide comfortable accommodations for our employees.

“For instance, we provide mattresses that are thicker than required; water filters at all hostels; as well as subsidised meals; and have a Zero Harm and Safety Health Emergency Preparedness Programme as well as a Workers’ Health Protection Programme, which is uncommon among manufacturing firms in Malaysia, ” said Lee, adding that the company also hires over 205 auxiliary police and security personnel to patrol factories, hostels and nearby residential and community areas to ensure the safety and well-being of employees and residents.

The amended Act 446 came into force on Sept 1,2020 and to comply with that in the immediate term, Top Glove had invested RM90mil in housing for its workers to no more cramped accommodation for its workers going forward. In the medium term, Top Glove is spending RM165mil to build homes in Klang and Banting that can house 10,000 workers. These housing would not be far from the Top Glove’s factories. A further RM30mil is allocated to provide housing in other states. Top Glove’s total investment in worker accommodation amounted to RM195mil in the medium-term.

“For us, the legislation coming into effect is a good thing; it’s an important legislation to have so Malaysia can be known as a country that takes seriously human rights and ESG considerations. And while it may require an adjustment period, industry players should all look at it as a guide and an opportunity to go further for our employees, who are the backbone of any organisation,” added Lee.