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Coleman states University will approve apparel accords

By [MAX](#)

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[RADWIN \(/PEOPLE/MRADWIN/MAX RADWIN\)](#), Daily Staff Reporter
Published April 3, 2014

A day after a handful of protesters convened in the Fleming Administration Building to protest the University's contracts with apparel suppliers, University President Mary Sue Coleman announced a new set of guidelines designed to ensure worker safety in Bangladesh — a major textile producing country.

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Coleman stated Tuesday that all University licensees — companies that produce products using the University's branding — must adhere to the Accord on Fire and Building Safety or present their own guidelines that are of an equivalent rigor. The accord is an agreement between the nation's trade unions and factory managers designed to improve safety at manufacturing facilities.

Over the past several years, the University's chapter of United Students Against Sweatshops has been working to increase the awareness of working conditions in Bangladesh's factories. The student organization has hosted "die-in" protests (<http://www.michigandaily.com/news/usas-holds-die-protest-unsafe-factory-conditions>) on the Diag, talks by Bangladeshi and Indonesian [sweatshop workers](#) (<https://www.michigandaily.com/article/student-group-hosts-sweatshop-workers>) and led a "naked" protest Monday to raise

awareness of the conditions of worker unions and garment factories both locally and overseas.

In the fall, Coleman referred the issue to the President's Advisory Committee on Labor Standards and Human Rights, which advises the University about its policies regarding the companies that manufacture all items with the University's emblems. The committee that recommended that "the University of Michigan reiterate to ALL its licensees the importance of honoring its code of conduct including the guarantee of health and safety of workers."

"When (companies) produce their apparel, they don't really look out for their workers' rights there at all," said Public Policy junior Maya Menlo, USAS Worker Rights Consortium Board representative and member of the President's Advisory Committee on Labor Standards and Human Rights. "It's something that we try to mobilize students around because we don't want, for instance, a U of M T-shirt being produced in a factory that's about to collapse. We don't want blood on our hands. And more than that, we care about the equality of workers in general."

The poor and unsafe working conditions in many of Bangladesh's factories came to international attention last April (<https://www.michigandaily.com/news/vigil-raises-awareness>) when an eight-story facility collapsed and killed more than 1,000 workers.

In a release Thursday, Coleman lauded organizers for thoughtful consideration of the issue.

"We expect that all licensees provide workers a safe and healthy working environment regardless of what country they are working in to produce goods," Coleman said. "I am impressed by USAS's commitment to the wellbeing of the workers in Bangladesh."

The release also noted that the University joins nine other universities in attaching such an accord to apparel licensing agreements, including Brown University, Columbia University and



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University spokesman Rick Fitzgerald said companies have until May 16 to sign the accord or they will no longer be allowed to produce University-licensed products. Adidas, one of the University's main licensees, has already signed the agreement, but Collegiate Licensing — an American collegiate trademark licensing and marketing company that manufactures University apparel — has yet to sign.

Fitzgerald said acceptance of the accord was motivated by the need to improve worker safety.

"This is specifically about worker safety standards," Fitzgerald said. "This isn't about what companies any one company may be investing with. This is specifically aimed at making sure there are safe working conditions for fire safety for any of the manufacturing facilities where U of M-licensed products are made."



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This is a surprising turn around from Coleman's stance in 2007 when students protested the same issues in her office.

"Shortly after her arrival, at 9 am, President Mary Sue Coleman met briefly with the students to say, 'We don't accept demands from students.'"

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2007/04/stud-a17.html>

That protest included Rabhi Yousef, who is now a member of the Board of Commissioners.

<http://www.michigandaily.com/content/u-senior-run-county-commissioner>

The 2007 protests were part of a nation wide campaign of protests on sweatshop labor but only two universities threatened to arrest students and only UM prosecuted them.

Contrast this with the recent sit-in at the offices of the Central Student Government. That lasted for days but no students were arrested.

President Coleman has her own police force and she is not afraid to use it.

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