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## **Workers stage 'Olympics' to protest sportswear industry abuses**

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BANGKOK, Thailand

Trying to bring attention to labor conditions in the sportswear industry, more than 500 workers from eight Asian nations staged their own "Olympics" here Sunday, complete with javelin toss, shot put - and protest signs demanding fair wages.

The event was part of an effort by international labor unions and social activist groups to win protection for workers who produce clothing and equipment for companies linked to the Olympic Games, which open Friday in Greece.

Much of the world's sportswear is made in Asia, where the industry employs hundreds of thousands of workers.

Many laborers work in sweatshop conditions in countries including those represented Sunday: the Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia and Thailand.

Thai garment worker Sunee Namso, 29, who was on a soccer team at the event at a Bangkok sports stadium, said it was like "the ideal of what the Olympics should be: not for the millions of dollars, but for building up trust and good feeling."

Sunee said she worked for seven years in a dust-filled factory from 8 a.m. until 10 p.m., sewing arm pieces for shirts. She made 3 baht (US\$0.07) for every 12 sets she sewed.

"If you didn't work those long hours, you didn't have enough to eat," said Sunee, who now works in a sewing cooperative formed by workers after the factory closed in 2002.

Organizers of Sunday's event said they are focusing on the Olympics because of the attention given to the Games and because the International Olympic Committee has the stature to force changes among companies that use the licensed Olympic logo.

In May, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the world's largest union group, asked the IOC to ensure that products that use the Olympic logo are made using international labor standards.

The IOC said it is working with companies that have strict codes of conduct but that it doesn't control licensing of all Olympic products.

Labor activists at Sunday's games said conditions in the garment industry have received more international attention in the past decade, but that workers still have a long way to go.

Some companies, including Nike, Adidas and Reebok, have held discussions with labor groups about improving working conditions, said Ineke Zeldenrust of the Clean Clothes Campaign, a Netherlands-based group that focuses on labor rights in the garment industry.

But Zeldenrust said action has been slow, and many smaller companies have ignored the issue.

"The ball is in the field, so to speak, but it needs to actually go somewhere," she said.

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