

## **Finnwatch Research: Ongoing serious rights abuses found in export orientated pineapple factories in Thailand**

Finnwatch, a Finnish non-profit organisation focusing on global corporate responsibility issues, conducted in-depth field research in three locations in Thailand during November–December 2013. This research focused on responsibility of Finnish retail companies' supply chain management.

One part of the research concerned labour conditions at Vita Food Factory in Kanchanaburi Province in Western Thailand.

*– Based on the documented interviews with factory workers, and numerous other sources, we have reason to suspect serious violations of basic human and labour rights are commonplace at Vita Food Factory, says Sonja Vartiala, Executive Director of Finnwatch.*

All interviewed workers, mostly from Myanmar, reported labour brokers used by Vita Food Factory unlawfully confiscated work permits documents. Passports were also confiscated and many workers paid significant amounts of money to factory brokers who unlawfully deducted debts from their salaries. According to workers, factory brokers threaten and beat workers. All interviewed said that their overtime compensation was lower than that defined in Thai labour laws.

Human rights issues in Vita Food Factory have been highlighted many times before in several other reports and statements both domestically inside Thailand and internationally.

*– It seems previous concerns regarding Vita have not been taken seriously enough, Vartiala says.*

Vita Food Factory, a member of Thai Food Processing Association (TFPA), didn't comment on Finnwatch's findings, despite being given the opportunity to do so.

Finnwatch also conducted research in 2 tuna factories, Thai Union Manufacturing (TUM) and Unicord 2. TUM workers still pay high registration fees that are twice the amount paid by workers at many other companies in the industry. The subcontractor of TUM participated in corrupt practices by Thai officials that resulted in overcharging. Unicord 2 had replaced a workers' statutory break to take place after work and, at the time of research, still confiscated work permit documents.

*– Despite the ongoing problems, both factories engaged in active dialogue with Finnwatch and committed to improvements. Many of the findings in our report have already been addressed by the tuna factories concerned but we shall continue to monitor the situation closely, says Vartiala.*

The Finnwatch report also includes a field study on working conditions at Natural Fruit, a pineapple processor that had also been investigated in a previous Finnwatch report, launched in January 2013.

*– According to the interviewed workers, Natural Fruit factory still confiscates work permits, prevents workers from changing employer and makes unlawful deductions from their unlawfully low salaries. The same problems that have been highlighted in Thai authorities' own investigation report of conditions at the factory still persist, says Vartiala.*

Natural Fruit responded to Finnwatch's findings denying all illegalities. The company's criminal and civil defamation and computer crimes act prosecutions against migrant rights defender Andy Hall continue.

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