

# TOP GLOVE WORKS WITH CRITIC TO IMPROVE WORKING CONDITIONS

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PETALING JAYA: Glove manufacturer Top Glove Corp Bhd is working with one of its loudest critics as it takes measures to improve working and living conditions at its factories.

Independent workers rights specialist Andy Hall said he has agreed to collaborate with Top Glove as a “critical friend” and was happy to learn about the company’s commitment towards promoting foreign workers’ rights and addressing environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) issues.

“I am not expecting everything to be perfect, but as long as the company is committed to addressing these issues, it’s a great platform for us to work together for the benefit of migrant workers, the company, investors and the international community that are concerned about ethical issues,” he said in a webinar in the presence of Top Glove's top executives on Thursday (April 8).

Hall said he has been looking into issues within the glove industry for about six years and started looking into Top Glove's operations in 2018.

He said there has been gradual improvements within the company and has seen many changes, including travel documents being returned to workers and the remediation of recruitment fees.

Top Glove has also engaged a trade consultancy agency, Impactt, to look into working conditions in the company and found that there were no longer systematic forced labour elements there.

Hall said Top Glove was making progress, but there are other issues that it still needs to work on such as workers' accommodation, its whistleblowing policy, better wages and more importantly, social dialogue between management and workers.

“Social dialogue is a very critical and challenging issue and has to do with how to bring workers and management together in a joint goal for workers to be happy, and have grievance channels and have a say about their work life and future, ” he said.

Top Glove was thrown into the spotlight after it was linked to the largest Covid-19 cluster to date, the Teratai cluster.

As Top Glove improves its working conditions, it is also in the process of resolving the withhold release order (WRO) by the US Customs and Border Protection department imposed on two of Top Glove's subsidiaries.

The WRO was issued in July last year based on information that multiple forced labour indicators exist in Top Glove's production process.

On March 29, the USCBP issued a directive to seize gloves produced by the company at all US ports.

Top Glove managing director Datuk Lee Kim Meow said the company is currently engaging with USCBP on Impactt's findings.

“Once the department has determined that the indicators have been remediated it will then proceed to either modify or revoke the WRO,” he said.

So far, the company said it has rectified six out of 11 issues of forced labour indicators, including allegations of retention of identity documents, excessive overtime, movement restriction and withholding of wages and are working to rectify the rest.

It is in the process of improving workers accommodation and has completed its short-term plan of relocating its workers to new accommodations last year.

It is also in the process of procuring newer and better accommodation for its workers.