

## IKEA 'deeply regrets' forced prison labour

17<sup>th</sup> November, 2012



One of Sweden's most famous companies has apologised for selling products made in communist prisons. The furniture giant IKEA said it "deeply regrets" buying furniture that was made using forced labour in prisons in East Germany over twenty years ago. IKEA is famous for its modern, clean designs and reasonable prices. However, few people knew about a dark period in its history. The company now admits that political prisoners in communist East Germany were forced to make some of the furniture sold in IKEA stores across the world. This was before the fall of the Berlin Wall, when Germany was split in two. IKEA manager Jeanette Skjelmoose told reporters: "We deeply regret that this could happen."

IKEA said it checks working conditions at its suppliers very carefully. They also checked suppliers 20 to 30 years ago, but their checks did not find the use of forced labour in prisons. Ms Skjelmoose said: "The use of political prisoners for manufacturing was at no point accepted by IKEA...[30 years ago] we didn't have the well-developed control system that we have today. We clearly did too little to [stop those] methods." Many of the prisoners now want compensation – they want IKEA to pay them for their work. Human rights campaigner Rainer Wagner said many western companies used cheap, forced, prison labour in East Germany. He said: "IKEA is only the tip of the iceberg."

Sources: *The Washington Post* / *BBC*

### Writing

*Many companies care about profits more than working conditions for workers. These companies should be banned. Discuss.*

### Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

*Sweden's most famous companies / communist / prisons / furniture / Berlin Wall / regret / working conditions / manufacturing / compensation / human rights / icebergs*

### True / False

- IKEA has said sorry for selling its furniture in communist prisons. T / F
- Two decades ago, IKEA bought from suppliers who used forced labour. T / F
- The furniture in the story was made in Bulgarian prisons in the 1980s. T / F
- IKEA's CEO told reporters of the deep regret this could happen. T / F
- IKEA said checks on working conditions did not find the forced labour. T / F
- A manager said IKEA never accepted work from political prisoners. T / F
- IKEA has promised to pay the prison workers compensation. T / F
- A human rights worker said more companies used forced prison labour. T / F

### Synonym Match

- |                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| 1. most famous   | a. is sorry about |
| 2. prisons       | b. production     |
| 3. regrets       | c. divided        |
| 4. admits        | d. obviously      |
| 5. split         | e. best known     |
| 6. checks        | f. accepts        |
| 7. manufacturing | g. system         |
| 8. clearly       | h. jails          |
| 9. methods       | i. activist       |
| 10. campaigner   | j. examines       |

### Discussion – Student A

- What do you think about IKEA selling furniture that was made using forced labour?
- What do you know about the communist countries before the fall of the Berlin wall?
- What do you think of IKEA?
- What kind of furniture do you have / like?
- Do all companies have dark histories?
- Do you think IKEA is a better company because it apologized about its past?
- Have you ever been to an IKEA store? What did you think of it?
- Why do you think IKEA is more famous than other furniture companies?

## Phrase Match

- |                                   |                                  |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. One of Sweden's most           | a. split in two                  |
| 2. furniture that was made        | b. stop those methods            |
| 3. few people knew about a        | c. regret that this could happen |
| 4. when Germany was               | d. conditions at its suppliers   |
| 5. We deeply                      | e. famous companies              |
| 6. IKEA said it checks working    | f. of the iceberg                |
| 7. The use of political prisoners | g. using forced labour           |
| 8. We clearly did too little to   | h. want compensation             |
| 9. Many of the prisoners now      | i. dark period in its history    |
| 10. the tip                       | j. for manufacturing             |

## Discussion – Student B

- Do you think companies should check their suppliers more?
- Do companies care about profits more than working conditions?
- What other companies have been in the news about working conditions?
- Should past IKEA employees go to court for not spotting the use of forced labour?
- What do you know about the Berlin wall?
- How much compensation should IKEA pay the workers?
- Are governments around the world doing enough for?
- Do you think other companies will apologise for using forced labour?

## Spelling

- One of Sweden's most famous paisncoem
- csdoturp made in communist prisons
- The uunfreirt giant IKEA
- clean designs and oasrleenab prices
- piiollcta prisoners
- when Germany was tpsli in two
- working iocistdnon
- the well-pdoeldeve control system
- We elyarlc did too little
- the prisoners now want tcsomnaionpe
- human ihrsqt campaigner
- the tip of the ebgcire

### Answers – Synonym Match

1. e	2. h	3. a	4. f	5. c
6. j	7. b	8. d	9. g	10. i

## Role Play

**Former prisoner** - You made a lot of furniture in an East German prison 30 years ago. Your "crime" was writing about human rights. You worked long hours making IKEA beds. You now have bad eyesight. IKEA made a lot of money from the beds. You want a lot of compensation. Think of three reasons why.

**IKEA CEO** - Apologise very deeply to everyone for what happened. You think IKEA has done enough – it has admitted its suppliers used forced labour. BUT... the suppliers should pay compensation. They are the ones who were wrong. You will NOT pay compensation. NEVER! Think of three reasons why.

**An IKEA customer** - You are angry about IKEA selling furniture made by forced labour. Think of three reasons why. Tell the CEO just an apology is not good enough. You will start a global Internet campaign to ask people not to shop at IKEA if the CEO does not pay compensation. You hate the IKEA worker's ideas.

**An IKEA store worker** - You love working for IKEA. Think of three reasons why. You are worried that the company might be hurt by this news story. Try to get the worker to accept secret compensation (he/she must never tell reporters). Tell the IKEA boss he has to pay something to keep IKEA's good image.

## Speaking – Furniture

Rank these and share your rankings with your partner. Put the most important at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- |                    |                     |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| • framed paintings | • mirror            |
| • bed              | • closet / wardrobe |
| • bookcase         | • coffee table      |
| • desk             | • carpet            |

### Answers – True False

a	F	b	T	c	F	d	F	e	T	f	T	g	F	h	T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.