



Open letter to brands and retailers purchasing Assam tea attending the TEAM UP 2016 conference on tea and sustainability

14 June 2016

RE: Raising wages in Assam and request to remove litigation in the Guwahati High Court which is preventing updated minimum wage payments on Assam tea estates

To coincide with TEAM UP 2016 in London, we are writing to welcome the work that tea estates, brands and retailers have engaged in to date to improve living and working conditions on tea estates in Assam.

We would like to emphasise that further work is needed to improve wage levels of tea workers in Assam, particularly in light of the risk of slavery and reported instances of human trafficking in the sector and from Assam. Tea workers in Assam currently earn a cash wage of just Rs.126 per day (less than £1.50) pursuant to an industry-negotiated wage agreement. The ongoing litigation in the Guwahati High Court continues to prevent the Assam Government's proposed revision of the minimum daily wage for tea workers to Rs.177.19 (comprising a cash wage of Rs.143 and other in-kind benefits) from coming into effect. While this proposal of July 2015 sought to bring wages in line with minimum wage standards at the time, the Assam Government has meanwhile revised the minimum wage standard for unskilled labourers to Rs. 240/day.

The current cash wage and proposed Rs. 177.19/day (Rs.143 and benefits) package is still far below the income necessary for a worker to meet their basic needs. An economic study carried out in 2014 in Assam assessed a living wage to be Rs.330/day.

We are writing now to request that as purchasers of tea from Assam estates, you ask any of your suppliers that are backing the litigation which blocks the updated minimum wage coming into effect, to withdraw their support for the litigation; and that you review your purchasing practices to enable the payment of the updated minimum wage at the tea estates which supply you with Assam tea. We expect you to support your suppliers to ensure that the non-wage benefits specified in the Indian Plantations Labour Act, 1951 are delivered in conjunction with and not at the expense of current cash wages, so that workers earn sufficient to live on.

These pro-active steps are critical to developing a road map for a living wage for tea workers in Assam.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely,

Natalie Bridgeman Fields, Executive Director, *Accountability Counsel*
Peter Frankental, Economic Relations Programme Director, *Amnesty International UK*
Dr. Aidan McQuade, Director, *Anti-Slavery International*
Marilyn Croser, Director, *CORE Coalition*
Meena Varma, Director, *Dalit Solidarity Network UK*
Linda Devereux MBE, Chair, *Homeworkers Worldwide*
Sukti Dhital, Executive Director, *Nazdeek*
Jon Hoare, Director of Policy & Investor Networks, *ShareAction*
Frances O'Grady, General Secretary, *Trades Union Congress UK*
Andy Biggs, Managing Director, *Traidcraft*
Joanna Ewart-James, Director, *Walk Free*