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Hygienic Conditions of "Disposable Chopsticks"

May 1, 2004

An Investigative Report on the Hygienic Conditions of "Disposable Chopsticks," a Slave Labor Product Exported from China

May 1, 2004 [Investigation evidence] Recently, the Falun Gong Human Rights Working Group exposed to the world the use of slave labor by China's Bureau of Re-education-Through-Labor to produce "hygienic" disposable chopsticks at various re-education camps. However, the "hygienic" conditions were extremely shocking. The Epoch Times reported on February 25, 2004: "With dozens of inmates squeezed into one small room, the chopsticks waiting to be packaged were piled on the floor arbitrarily, and often stepped on by workers. The inmates' job was to put the chopsticks into paper coverings labeled by the Department of Sanitation and Epidemic Prevention, though the inmates had not gone through any epidemic prevention or sanitary measures themselves. Many of them had skin diseases, such as scabies outbreaks, and some were drug addicts or had been diagnosed with sexually transmitted diseases." Dalian Forced Labor Camp in Dalian City, Liaoning Province, also performed the same work, and they exported the chopsticks produced there to Japan. It was stated that the only sanitary standard was that no hair should be in the package. "The quota for each person was to package from 7,500 pairs of chopsticks to 10,000 pairs of chopsticks per day. Even working from 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 a.m., it was impossible to reach the quota. Besides the unbearable pain in one's upper and lower back, we also had to endure verbal abuse and beatings from the police and their aides." [<http://www.dajiyuan.com/gb/4/2/25/n473854.htm>]

The following labor camps are suspected of participating in the slave production of "hygienic" chopsticks: Shenyang Zhangshi Reformatory Camp, Beijing Reeducation-Through-Labor Bureau Dispatching unit, Dalian Labor Reformatory, Tianjin Shuangkou Reeducation-Through-Labor Institute, and Hebei Longfang city Detention Center.

Through the investigation and documentation by the World Organization to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong (WOIPFG), it was revealed that hygiene standards and enforcement policies in the Chinese labor camp system are in a state of being out of control. An official in charge of the Zhejiang Province sanitary supervision department, who chose to remain anonymous, stated "For the disposable chopsticks, many government departments could manage the situation, such as the Medical department, the Drug Surveillance department, or the Engineering Supervision department. The Industry and Commerce administrative department, as well as the Farming and Forestry Industry department could also manage it. Every department could manage it, yet no department wants to do anything about it." [1]

On August 21, 2003, the deputy director of China's Packing Resources Utilization Committee, Mr. Dong Jinshi, accepted an interview with CCTV in which he stated: "According to our statistics, at present, the national disposable chopsticks usage amounts to 35 billion pairs. The majority of the chopsticks on the market, should I say, do not conform to the hygienic requirement. Eighty percent of the chopsticks—more than 20 billion pairs—do not conform to the hygienic standard."

In March, 2004, the Beijing Disease Control and Prevention Center disclosed an astonishing fact: "The Chinese government has not established a production examination standard for the disposable chopsticks"... "the disposable chopsticks have no hygienic permit serial number. These permit serial numbers very likely are made up, or in some cases, there's the possibility that the factories may have applied the serial number of the disposable paper cups or other paper goods onto the chopsticks." [2] For over ten years, however, these unhygienic chopsticks have been exported to Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Europe and North America. Japan is the largest importer of the chopsticks, and China and Japan are the main consumers of chopsticks.

Because the cheap labor and low cost of raw materials for production have made the "hygienic chopstick" industry very profitable, many re-education-through-labor camps have begun to produce chopsticks. In 2001, it was reported that the Ministry of Justice proposed the "three moves" [refer to note 2] in re-education-through-labor production. For example, the Dehong forced labor camp in Yunnan Province has established a disposable chopsticks factory [3] in a joint venture with foreign investment. The law put forth by the Justice Ministry indicates that "Chinese prisons are not to establish joint-venture or joint enterprise with foreign businessmen." These are simply empty words.

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In 2002, the producers of sanitary bamboo chopsticks in China exported the chopsticks at a much lower price to compete with each other for exportation. Under the situation, the China State Council and the Foreign Trade Economic Cooperation Department authorized the Domestic Livestock Trade Commission to hold the National Bamboo Sanitary Chopsticks Exportation Enterprise Conference from April 21 to 23, in Fuzhou. It was proposed at the conference that the bamboo sanitary chopsticks should be exported to the Japanese market, and the European and American market at the “lowest price limit.” Coordinated by the Chinese Food and Domestic Livestock Trade Commission [refer to note 3], large quantities of unhygienic disposable chopsticks were exported from China to places such as Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Europe and America.

At the beginning of 2004, China’s “hygienic” chopstick industry faced the threat of losing its foothold in the chopstick market when Falun Gong practitioners exposed the unsanitary conditions in the production of “hygienic” chopsticks. Under pressure from public opinion, the Hygienic Chopstick Branch Committee, part of the China Food and Livestock Department, published “Temporary Regulations and Implementation Methods of Hygiene Control in Chopstick Exporting Enterprises.” At the sixth meeting of council members and supervisors, it was decided that council members and the chopstick producers would coordinate to form inspection teams to go to the chopstick factories in different regions and carry out on-site health inspections. Each chopstick producer was notified in advance on April 19, 2004, as to what date and time their factory would be inspected. The enterprises and exporting companies have been repeatedly advised to “please get ready for inspection and actively cooperate with the inspection team” and were told, “Each exporting company should notify the manufacturing enterprises to prepare for the inspection.” The scheduled inspection period is from May 8 to June 1, 2004.[4]

WOIPFG has noted the following with regard to the scheduled inspections:

1. This sanitation inspection of the export-related businesses was not authorized by the government Health Administrative Department, as the laws for food sanitation in China require [5], but instead it was organized and approved by council members and manufacturing enterprise owners.
2. The Hygienic Chopstick Branch Committee notified all the chopstick manufacturing enterprises in advance of the inspection, but they failed to enforce any measures requiring the manufacturers to improve their food sanitation control system.
3. The hygienic inspection standards in chopstick production only apply to chopsticks that are to be exported. According to Chinese government statistics in 2002, 45 billion pairs of chopsticks are produced and used in China annually. Fifteen billion additional pairs are exported to Japan, South Korea and other countries. Even if the 15 billion pairs marked for exportation all pass the hygiene inspection, the 45 billion pairs marked for domestic use have not passed through any health inspection.
4. Article Four of the state government’s order against the exportation of products produced in re-education camps (State Department Document 1991, No. 63) states that: “Reiteration is hereby given that the exportation of products manufactured in reform-through-labor camps is prohibited. Exporting companies are not permitted to purchase such products, nor should other trading companies be allowed to purchase such products for the purpose of exportation. Jails and prisons should not provide foreign trade companies with supplies for exportation [6].” However, under authorization from the Department of Justice, re-education-through-labor camps are currently taking full advantage of the great number of people detained in the system to produce slave labor products such as “hygienic” chopsticks for the purpose of exportation. Apparently, in regard to products for exportation, the state department does not have jurisdiction over the department of Commerce and Trade, the Department of Justice, or the subordinate Re-education-Through-Labor institutions.

Today, if a consumer were to go to the health administration department in a city in China to request a health inspection of a pair of chopsticks, the health official would only be able to provide information about what types of bacteria are present on the chopsticks. They would not be able to tell whether the amount of bacteria exceeds acceptable standards or not, since there simply is no established health standards for chopsticks. Regardless, the Department of Commerce and the

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Department of Justice do not enforce the state department's regulation against exporting products made in re-education-through-labor institutions.

The following testimonies were provided by Falun Gong practitioners regarding their experiences making chopsticks in forced-labor camps.

Falun Gong practitioner Mr. Yu Ming, former head of a clothing manufacturer in Liaoyang City of Liaoning Province, wrote the following about his experience in the force labor camp:

“In the Tuanhe Forced Labor Camp in the Daxing District of Beijing City, the Department of Dispatch forced everyone to work from the early morning to midnight to make money for the policemen. Most of the work was packaging disposable ‘sanitary’ or ‘convenient’ chopsticks in paper wrappers. They were then deemed to have met the “Sanitary Quality Standard” and sold to small roadside restaurants. The profit for one box of chopsticks is about 6 yuan. Each inmate finishes about 3 boxes per day and there are about 160 people per unit. You can imagine how much money one unit can make for those policemen each day.”

Mr. Yu continued:

“The inmates’ dormitories were used as the workshops. They were very crowded to begin with, so the chopsticks were scattered all over the floor. Sometimes they were dropped into the open toilet, but nobody cared. They would just pick the chopsticks up and put them in the paper wrappers, since the total number of chopsticks could not be short by even one. The police watched the inmates carefully on the numbers, but inmates were never required to wash their hands. The majority of the inmates were drug addicts and prostitutes, yet there were no formal medical examinations here to determine whether a person was carrying hepatitis or sexually transmitted diseases. Any inmate still breathing was forced to work for the police. Even those people who had scabies all over their bodies were forced to work and grabbed the chopsticks with hands covered by scabies infections.” “Anyone behind schedule or failing to complete the policemen’s quota was beaten by the police and other inmates, forced to stand outside and not move for long periods, or deprived of sleep as punishment for not meeting their production quota. Every unit and every cell was crawling with lice, and the inmates were not allowed to take showers for long periods. Guards patrolled, carrying electric stun batons and handcuffs. Many inmates never dared to raise their heads to look at the sky after being here for long enough.” [\[http://www.dajiyuan.com/gb/4/2/25/n473854.htm\]](http://www.dajiyuan.com/gb/4/2/25/n473854.htm)

Gong Chenxi was a student in the Department of Administration Management at China University of Political Science and Law. He was arrested and sent to the Tuanhe labor camp in Beijing for distributing pamphlets with information about the persecution of Falun Gong. The following is an excerpt of his testimony:

“The sanitary conditions in the Department of Dispatch were extremely poor. Everyone was given only a few minutes of restroom and wash time in the morning and evening. As soon as you sat down in the restroom, the police might already be shouting and calling everyone to go out and form lines. We were not allowed to take showers for extended periods of time. Only after the camp authorities discovered that many inmates had lice all over their bodies were we allowed to take our first shower. Still, dozens of people were sent into a room with only two showers, for no more than a few minutes. In the summer of 2002, a hepatitis epidemic broke out in the Department of Dispatch.”

“In order to maximize the profit from the inmates' work, the Department of Dispatch bordered on madness. The quota for each person per day was 7,500 to over 10,000 pairs of chopsticks. Even working from 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 a.m., it was impossible to finish the quota. Besides the unbearable pain in one’s upper back and lower back, we also had to endure verbal abuse and beatings from the police and their aides. During my one month in the department of dispatch, each day was like that. Several elderly Falun Gong practitioners, Dao Wanhui, Yang Juhai, Li Xieliang, Chen Jingjian and Jia Lin, worked as fast as they could but still could not finish the quota, so the unit head ordered them to sit on the cement floor outside to work for several hours in icy weather. If they still failed to complete the quota, they were be deprived of sleep, and only allowed 3-4 hours a night.” [\[http://www.epochtimes.com/gb/4/2/26/n474207.htm\]](http://www.epochtimes.com/gb/4/2/26/n474207.htm)

Beijing Falun Gong practitioner Chen Ying’s testimony:

“Because I continued to practice Falun Gong after the Chinese Government banned Falun Gong, I was sent to the re-

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education-through-labor institute from November 2000 to November 2001. During that time, I was detained in the Beijing Tuanhe Re-education-Through-Labor Institute and the Beijing Xinan Re-education-Through-Labor Institute. While there, I was forced to do slave labor. I was forced to make various types of slave labor products.

“While detained in the Tuanhe Re-education-Through-Labor Institute, we were given very little time to sleep. We were forced to work as soon as we opened our eyes. We had to work extremely hard in order to finish our daily workload of wrapping chopsticks assigned by the police. Our hands were full of bloody blisters and calluses from rubbing. We often had to work till midnight. But if we didn’t get the job done by then, we still were not allowed to sleep. We were forced to work for over 16 hours a day. All the work was done in a small room where we work, eat, drink, sleep and use the toilet. It was in such disgusting hygienic conditions that we were forced to wrap disposable ‘hygienic’ bamboo chopsticks. Ironically, the paper wrapping contained the label: ‘disinfected by high-temperature processing.’ Actually, the entire procedure appeared to be extremely unsanitary. We were not allowed to wash our hands and the chopsticks that fell on the ground were used as well, not discarded.”

[<http://search.minghui.org/mh/articles/2004/3/2/68993.html> and <http://www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2004/3/19/46194.html>]

References:

- [1] People’s Daily, March 26, 2004, <http://www.gog.com.cn/jqpd/pd0401/ca583109.htm> (Back)
- [2]. Jiang Nan Health Care Newspaper, March 26, 2004, Friday Edition <http://www.wxrb.com/home.nsf/documentview/04-03-26-89-AF34A39486EB317448256E630024E35D?OpenDocument> (Back)
- [3] Yunnan “Dehong Yearbook,” <http://61.166.95.68/pubnews/doc/read/dszt2/943579531.82203140/index.asp> (Back)
- [4] “Notice on Carrying on Health Standard Inspection of Chopsticks-Producing Enterprises,” <http://www.cccfna.org.cn/wenben03.jsp?id=27003>
(2004) Food-land-trade Hygienic Chopsticks Branch Committee Document No. 05
Notice Regarding the Health Standard Inspection of Chopstick-Producing Enterprises

All Bamboo Hygienic Chopsticks Producing Enterprises:

According to the regulations documented in the “Temporary Regulations for the Hygienic Control Methods of Chopstick Exporting Enterprises” and the resolution from the sixth meeting of council members and supervisors from the Hygienic Chopsticks Branch Committee Coordination Group (May 8, 2004 through to June 1, 2004), the Chopsticks Coordination Group will formally inspect the implementation of the regulated hygienic standards for all bamboo chopstick producing enterprises and fill out the necessary inspection forms. After the inspection, the results from each enterprise will be compiled and posted. All the enterprises that meet the standard regulated requirements will be issued a certificate of qualification, those that don’t meet the standards will be temporarily suspended from their authorization for representing exporting enterprises status and will be ordered to correct and reform any unhygienic practices within a given time limit. The inspection will be carried out in Hunan, Guangdong, Guangxi, Fujian, Jiangxi, Hubei, Zhejiang, Shanghai and Jiangsu. Council members and the inspection group will go to the different regions to inspect the manufacturing enterprises. The inspection team will notify each enterprise in advance of the time of inspection. All the chopstick producing enterprises please prepare and actively cooperate with the inspection team.

All exporting companies need to notify the manufacturing enterprises they represent so that they can prepare for the inspection as well. If there are any question please contact the secretary division of the coordination group at tel: 010-65132382, or 65598241. and speak to Yang Chunpen, or Li Man.

Information may also be obtained at website: <http://www.agriffchina.com>

Chopstick Branch Committee, China Food and Domestic Livestock Import and Export Trading Commission
April 19, 2004
<http://www.chinalaw114.com/chinafa/shownews.asp?id=3557>(Back)

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[5] The People's Republic of China Food Hygiene Law([Back](#))

[6] Commands from the state government in its reiteration of guidelines regarding the prohibition of products exported from re-education-through-labor institutes. <http://www.chinalaw114.com/chinafa/shownews.asp?id=3557>

Commands from the state government in its reiteration of guidelines regarding the prohibition of products exported from re-education-through-labor institutes:

China Law and Regulation Information Net
July 31, 2001
State Council 1991 No. 63

Department of Economics and Trade, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Department of Justice:

Your request regarding "suggestion regarding the immediate announcement of prohibition of products exported from re-education through labor institutes has been received. Here is our written reply:

The state council has approved the reiteration of guidelines regarding the prohibition of products exported from re-education through labor institutes. The Department of Economics and Trade and the Department of Justice may publicly announce the immediate and strict implementation of this regulation.

October 5, 1991

Reiteration of the guidelines regarding the prohibition of products exported from re-education-through-labor institutes:

- 1) Products from re-education-through-labor institutes are the products made by the inmates in jails, which are affiliated with legal departments.
- 2) Following the rules set forth by the Department of Justice, agencies of the Department of Justice request that prisoners who are capable of carrying out labor for the purpose of educating and reforming them, as well as making them become independent laborers who can support themselves financially after they are released from the re-education camp, should do so. At the same time, in addition to re-education through labor, prisoners can receive professional training to prepare for employment when they re-enter society. This agrees with the "Guidelines for Prisoner Treatment" set out in the first UN convention on criminal prevention and treatment (1995.)
- 3) In terms of labor protection and medical care, laborers working in reeducation-through-labor facilities should enjoy the same benefits as they would working for a state enterprise.
- 4) Foreign trade companies are not allowed to purchase such products, nor can they ask other companies to purchase such products from re-education-through-labor institutes for exporting purposes, prisons and jails are also not allowed to provide foreign trade companies with re-education-through-labor products.
- 5) Jails and prisons are not permitted to set up joint ventures or joint investment agreements with foreign companies.
- 6) If any company or business is found to export products from re-education-through-labor institutes, customs has the right to detain the goods and confiscate all income, as well as punish the people responsible in accordance with the severity of the incident.
- 7) This regulation does not include enterprises that employ workers (and their family members) who are employed by the Chinese Justice Department.
- 8) This regulation becomes valid on the same day of publication, and this regulation should replace any previous regulation, upon the former's contradiction with the latter. ([Back](#))

(Note 1) Regular laborers refer to the regular laborers of re-education-through-labor who are not Falun Gong practitioners.

(Note 2) According to the explanation given by the party secretary and Director of the Jiangsu Provincial Bureau of Re-education-Through-Labor Institutes, Jiang Jingbin: "Three Moves" refers to when laborers of re-education-through-labor

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institutes are moved from outside workplaces to indoor workplaces; when they are moved from agriculture labor to intensive processing labor; and moved from re-education-through-labor units in remote places to city suburb areas that have a relatively more concentrated population

density. <http://www.jschina.com.cn/gb/jschina/news/qz/node5014/node5023/userobject1ai383106.html>

(Note 3) China Food and Domestic Livestock Trade Commission has approval from the China State Council, by the

Department of Foreign Trade and Economics Cooperation and by the governing body of the government. The commission is an organization jointed by those enterprises that have the authority to import and export grain, oil, food products and domestic livestock. It has status as a legal entity and has a total membership of over 2200 enterprises.

On April 21 through April 23, “the National Conference of Hygienic Bamboo Chopstick Exporting Businesses” was held in Fuzhou. The major issue of importance at the conference was to establish a hygienic bamboo chopstick exporting coordination group operating under the China Food and Domestic Livestock Trade Commission (referred to as a coordination group below).

The conference established “the low price limit for exporting hygienic bamboo chopsticks” for Japanese, Taiwanese, European and American markets. The conference also passed “The Guidelines for Discussing Matters within the Hygienic Bamboo Chopstick Coordination Group in accordance with the China Food and Domestic Livestock Trade Commission,” “The Labor Rules for Hygienic Bamboo Chopstick Exporting Coordination Group in accordance with the China Food and Domestic Livestock Trade Commission,” and “The Method for Coordination of Hygienic Bamboo Chopstick Exporting Coordination Group in accordance with the China Food and Domestic Livestock Trade Commission.”