

PRESS RELEASE

Recent BIR World Recycling Convention & Exhibition in Dubai (17 - 20 May 2015)

Textiles Division:

Used clothing industry a victim of “unjustifiable negative publicity”

Brussels, 28 May 2015

“We have the responsibility to give a clear vision of textiles recycling” so as to ensure the removal of import bans, as well as to “encourage open markets”, the “fluid movement of goods” and new product development. So said Mehdi Zerroug of France-based Framimex in his opening presidential address to the BIR Textiles Division meeting in Dubai on May 20. With nearly 60% reuse achieved after sorting, “our industry is exemplary from the hierarchy of treatment mode point of view”, he insisted.

The issue of misinformation leading to import bans was examined in more detail by General Delegate Alan Wheeler of the UK Textile Recycling Association. A number of articles published recently had claimed that the used clothing industry was largely responsible for the demise of textile production in some parts of Africa - but there was little plausible evidence to support this, he said.

Mr Wheeler identified a pressing need “to challenge such unjustifiable negative publicity” as the East African Community (EAC) intergovernmental organisation comprising five countries - Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda - was already debating the possibility of banning imports of used clothes, shoes and other leather products from outside the region. With the matter likely to be discussed at an EAC summit later in the year, “the international textile recycling industry needs to act now”, he insisted. “Through the BIR, we need to actively lobby the EAC, to explain to them why banning imports of used clothing will do nothing to help textile production and will jeopardise employment prospects for millions of people in the region and the economy as a whole.”

BIR – REPRESENTING THE FUTURE LEADING RAW MATERIAL SUPPLIERS

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Earlier, Mr Wheeler had reported that UK used clothing and textiles values were continuing to decline, albeit more slowly. In other market analyses, Sauro Ballerini of Italy suggested a weaker Euro had helped to stabilise the market in the second quarter of 2015.

The US market insight submitted by Eric Stubin of Trans-Americas Textile Recycling suggested that the outlook for most companies remained challenging. Osamu Shoji of Shoji & Co. supplied reports on the markets in Japan and in the wider Far East: in the former, he lamented that the quality of originals was worsening, with only 40% suitable for second-hand clothing and 20% as wiper grade; and for the latter, he said that volumes of original rags had been falling and that prices had risen to a point where no profit could be made from grading.

An in-depth review of the used clothing sector in Asia was provided by the Textiles Division's guest speaker Nohar Nath, Executive Director of the Kishco Group in India. He talked of a "dramatic shift" in the focus of activity, adding: "Until about 20 years ago, Japan was the only Asian country involved in grading/sorting, but today this is done in large volumes in more than 15 countries." For example, China, South Korea, Taiwan, Pakistan and the UAE each boasted more than 50 grading/sorting companies.

But while labour costs had been a "key driver" of this shift of business to Asia, "drastic" wage increases over the last three or four years had put "a question mark" over the viability of this business in the region, according to Mr Nath.

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