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Adidas Responds to Phony 'AdiVerse,' Impersonator and Allegations

The Yes Men and the Clean Clothes Campaign orchestrated an elaborate hoax to encourage the athletic juggernaut to sign the Pay Your Workers agreement.

By **ROSEMARY FEITELBERG**

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The DJ Marshmello impersonator and a man pretending to be an Adidas executive at the Web Summit event in Lisbon. PHOTO COURTESY THE YES MEN

The Yes Men and the Clean Clothes Campaign took aim at **Adidas** with an elaborate hoax at last week's Web Summit in Lisbon.

The ruse was designed to draw attention to the need for international companies to protect basic worker rights, provide adequate wages in their supply chains, to highlight some of the problems the groups say are tied to outsourcing and for **Adidas** to sign the Pay Your Workers agreement.

At last week's Web Summit in Portugal, a bespectacled man with a receding hairline and an accent acted as an Adidas executive and addressed the crowd in an 18-minute presentation. Identified at the event as "Aristide Feldholt, chief financial officer of AdiCoin," he talked up Adidas' launch of the "AdiVerse," a virtual playground for "faraway garment workers," that would "pay them in dreams" rather than money. The impersonator suggested, "Bad workplace conditions break open our hearts — but we have no control over the factories, by law and by contract and by design."

In a press release that was circulated Tuesday, organizers allege many governments in garment-producing countries temporarily lowered minimum wages in response to brands' order cancellations and subsequent failure to take responsibility for their workers. The Clean Clothes Coalition's Christie Miedema noted via email Tuesday that \$11.7 million in wages is [allegedly] owed to workers in Cambodia.

"We reject the allegations," an Adidas spokesperson told WWD in a statement Tuesday. "For more than 25 years, Adidas has taken a variety of measures to ensure fair and safe working conditions for workers in its supply chain. The Adidas Workplace Standards commit our suppliers to progressively increase worker compensation and living standards through continuous development of compensation systems, benefits, social programs and other services. The disposable income of workers in our supplier factories is generally significantly higher than the respective statutory minimum wage."

The company uses a team of approximately 50 "experts" globally to ensure its workplace standards are being applied and met by its suppliers, according to the statement. Last year, Adidas conducted more than 1,200 factory audits of suppliers. "If our standards are breached, we have a sanction mechanism in place

that can even lead to the termination of the business relationship,” the statement read.

Asked whether Adidas is looking into taking legal action, an Adidas spokesman said, “We don’t have more to share right now.”

Media requests sent to Web Summit organizers were not immediately acknowledged Tuesday. An automatic response message said the office was closed until Thursday.

Earlier this year, The Yes Men targeted Adidas with another hoax: a phony press release was circulated claiming a Cambodian factory worker and a union leader had been named co-chief executive officers. The second part was the fake launch of “Realitywear,” ethically sourced clothing, at an event at [Berlin](#) Fashion Week. The false collection was said to have had the support of Bad Bunny and Pharrell Williams. Both initiatives were designed to encourage Adidas to sign the Pay Your Workers agreement. The Yes Men bills itself as an “anti-corporate culture-jamming group.”

Miedema also said via email Tuesday that the Pay Your Workers coalition has repeatedly been in contact with Adidas representatives on different levels about the Pay Your Workers proposal, including a public appeal, talks between union representatives within the coalition and Adidas staffers among other initiatives.

Another component of the ruse was an appearance by someone who impersonated Deejay Marshmello, and hyped the alleged launch of “AdiVerse,” a virtual playground for garment workers. The real Deejay Marshmello, who did not respond immediately to a request for comment Tuesday, said on Instagram that “Whoever @websummit booked to perform and do interviews was not me. sorry to anyone who was misled by that imposter, my legal team has reached out #WebSummit.”

The Yes Men’s Andy Bichlbaum estimated that “around a thousand” people attended the presentation and a few dozen journalists were at the post-presentation press conference. The artist known as Thread & Tits also collaborated on the Lisbon initiative. Bichlbaum said via email Tuesday, “We wanted to make this about not just this particular [alleged] Adidas labor abuse case, but the whole problem of ‘modern’ outsourcing. So we started at the beginning and presented a no-punches-pulled history of exactly what outsourcing means. Only after all that was laid out did we get to the funnier part

with Marshmello and dancing and so on.”

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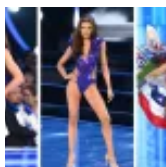
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