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Weather

Today: Sunny. High 70. Low 48.
Tomorrow: Mostly cloudy. High 65.

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Panel hosts debate on 'U' policy for sweatshops

By Shomari Terrelonge-Stone
Daily Staff Reporter

A panel of four anti-sweatshop sympathizers hosted an educational forum last night to address the different ways the University can help workers in sweatshops.

The panelists debated which type of implementation policy the University should use when dealing with sweatshops, the Worker Rights Consortium or the Federal Labor Association.

Marion Traub-Werner, a University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill student, commented on the strength of the WRC and said the University's support could induce company accountability and stop sweatshop abuses.

"WRC is an enforcement mechanism for the code of conduct," she said.

FLA and the WRC are alternative means to deal with sweatshop labor. Both advocate increased notification of factory sites, but members of Students for Organizing Labor and Economic Equality said they believe the WRC will be more successful in attaining that goal.

University administrators have said they will not decide until May if they will sign on to the WRC.

Traub-Werner also indicated that the WRC responds to worker complaints and uses independent investigations of factories to force companies to improve their labor prac-



JESSICA JOHNSON/Daily

Jeffrey Ballinger, director of Press for Change, spoke at last night's sweatshop panel. Ballinger works to expose Nike's sweatshop conditions in Indonesia.

tices. She also noted that the University can support "workers struggles and can hold companies accountable for all of their factories around the world" by bringing as much information to the public about these oppressive conditions.

SOLE said recently they have urged the University to join the WRC. The Michigan Student Assembly voted last week, 29-1, encouraging the University to embrace the WRC implementation policy.

SOLE members said the administration

needs "to take a stand" by joining the WRC.

Public Policy Prof. John Chamberlain, the head of a University board dealing with the anti-sweatshop movement, has said it would take until May for the Advisory Board to recommend the joining of WRC.

"We want the University to join WRC now so that it can participate in a process of turning the WRC into reality," said LSA junior and SOLE member Peter Romer-Friedman.

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SWEATSHOP

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"The University has only accepted a code of conduct, which is only a piece of paper. Now it must implement the policies that it has created."

But not all of the panelists agree with the sentiments of Trab-Werner and Romer-Friedman. Bama Athreya, director of Asia Programs for the International Labor Rights Fund, said the University should join the WRC and FLA.

Win Swinson of KPMG, an accounting firm, indicated that his firm has been reluctant to do sweatshop monitoring because it is a process that has been "highly discretionary," he said.

But Jeff Ballinger, director of Press For Change, who works on exposing Nike factory conditions in Indonesia, said he supports the WRC. He said that Nike's employees do not enjoy the benefits of seniority and indicated that a 10-year factory worker has the same income as a first-day worker.

"Workers are mistreated, we have to defend them. This is the next human rights issue of the next decade," Ballinger said.

Ballinger also alleges that when he tried to investigate Nike's factories in Indonesia, a worker rushed up to him and said, "Hey you can't be here unless you have Nike's permission."

Ballinger noted that companies such as Nike have misreported workers' wages. He said he found that "1,939 of the 2,300 Nike shoe workers were earning \$35 to \$42 per month," or about \$1.28 a day.

But Nike said 75 percent of its shoe workers earn an average of \$56 per month, approximately \$1.86 per day. Ballinger said he found that only 1 percent of the workers were making \$1.86 per day or more.

Traub-Werner indicated that it is difficult to police the entire industry and declare an entire company as "sweat-free." Even if you have a good monitoring process for sweatshops, it's only good for the week you're there."