

# Young Workers Toil to Churn out Santa's Toys

By Antoaneta Bezlova

Much of the world's Christmas glitter is made in China, in sweatshops where 1.5 million peasant girls work 12 or even 14 hours a day, inhaling toxic fumes.

China is quickly becoming the world's major producer of Christmas toys and decorations. It now makes 70 percent of the world's toys and its exports have doubled in just eight years.

All that is the work of women between 17 and 23 years old who live in cramped dormitories, 15 to a room, earning just US\$0.30 an hour.

Workers have no contracts and no unions to protect them from owners who sometimes withhold part or even all of the wages due them.

Most of China's toy manufacturers are funded by foreign companies. Hong Kong and Taiwanese companies that make goods for the likes of Disney, Hasbro and Mattel have long ago shifted production here. The availability of cheap, unregulated labour has also attracted manufacturers who used to be in countries like Thailand or Indonesia.

"The factory owners, who tend to be Asians, say they are being pressed by the Western companies," says Dr Anita Chan of the Australian National University. "They complain their profit margin is getting smaller because these companies press them to improve work conditions but do not want to share the cost in raising labour standards."

An investigation by the Asia Monitor Resource Centre into the price of a Barbie doll, half of whose supply are made in China, found that of the US\$10 retail price, US\$8 goes to transportation, marketing, retailing, wholesale and profit for Mattel.

Of the remaining US\$2, US\$1 is shared by the management and transpor-

tation in Hong Kong, US\$0.65 by the raw materials from Taiwan, Japan, the United States and Saudi Arabia.

The remaining US\$0.35 goes to producers in China for providing factory sites, labour and electricity.

Source: Inter Press Service, 23 December 2002



## Vatican Says Word 'Gender' is Anti-Church Code

The Vatican announced it will publish a collection of phrases and words including "reproductive rights" and "gender" that it says are code for anti-Catholic sentiments.

The Vatican said these and approximately 76 other neutral-sounding terms about family and life are used to cover up deeper, anti-Church meanings, according to The Associated

Press. The Vatican will publish the 1,000-page lexicon of the terms soon.

In an interview with the religious affairs monthly journal 30 Giorni (30 Days), Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, president of the Pontifical Council for the Family, said the phrase "reproductive rights" is misleading because it "is used for propaganda—not for the right to reproduction

but...to abortion," *The Washington Times* reported.

The Vatican decided to create the book after non-governmental organisations complained about "ambiguous" words and phrases used at United Nations meetings.

Trujillo said that while some UN treaties—such as the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of

Discrimination Against Women—sound good on the surface, "if you dig a little, you come to know that this CEDAW serves to protect women from marriage and from giving birth to children, which according to the feminist ideology would absolutely be two forms of slavery," according to The Associated Press.

Source: Womensenews, <<http://www.womensenews.org>>, 1 February, 2003