

China tells Apple to 'care for workers'

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International labour watchdog groups have said workers in Chinese plants run by major Apple supplier [Foxconn](#) of Taiwan are poorly treated, and have blamed a string of apparent suicides on the conditions.

Vice Premier Li Keqiang, who is likely to be China's next premier, met [Tim Cook](#) while the new Apple chief executive was visiting Beijing on Tuesday, the official [Xinhua news agency](#) reported.

Li told Cook multinational companies should "pay more attention to caring for workers", the report said.

Cook on Wednesday visited a Foxconn plant employing 120,000 people in China's central city of Zhengzhou, where he viewed the production line, Apple said.

California-based Apple is wildly popular in China, where its products such as the [iPhone](#) and [iPad](#) are coveted by wealthy consumers.

Greater China -- which includes Hong Kong and Taiwan -- has become Apple's fastest growing region, and revenue from there is second only to the United States.

"Tim had great meetings with Vice Premier Li and other top officials in Beijing," Apple said in a statement provided to AFP on Thursday.

"China is very important to us and we look forward to even greater investment and growth here," it said.

The company declined to comment on the issues discussed at the meetings with officials, which included Beijing's mayor.

Apple is still grappling with a series of problems from negative publicity over its supply chain to a trademark contest.

Chinese computer firm Proview Technology ([Shenzhen](#)) claims it owns the "iPad" trademark, and has sought to block sales of the iconic [tablet computer](#) in China through lawsuits.

Apple says it legally bought the rights to the trademark.

Xinhua quoted Li as saying that China would "strengthen [intellectual](#)

property rights protection", although the report did not say whether he commented directly on the trademark dispute.

The Taiwan affiliate of Proview registered "iPad" as a trademark in several countries including China as early as 2000 -- years before Apple began selling its product.

The US titan subsequently bought the rights for the global trademark, but Proview claims the Taiwanese affiliate had no right to sell the Chinese rights.

A Chinese court is now considering an appeal by Apple after rejecting its earlier lawsuit against Proview for trademark infringement last year due to lack of evidence.

A watchdog group, Fair Labor Association, recently toured Foxconn facilities and factories of other Apple suppliers in China with Apple's consent but has yet to release its findings.

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