

Samsung in hot seat over abusing Chinese workers

September 5 2012, by Youkyung Lee

(AP)—Fresh off a billion-dollar loss in a patent fight with rival smartphone maker Apple, embattled Samsung Electronics Co. now finds itself accused by a labor rights group of mistreating workers in China and illegally using child labor.

The New York based-China Labor Watch said its investigation into workplace conditions at eight factories in China showed some employees were working more than 100 hours per month of overtime and that children were knowingly employed.

China Labor Watch also said their investigation of the six Samsung-owned plants and two suppliers showed that [safety measures](#), such as providing [workers](#) with [protective clothing](#), were not followed.

The group also accused Samsung of barring workers from sitting during their shifts and said it had documented instances of physical and [verbal abuse](#).

The South Korean electronics giant responded swiftly to the allegations, acknowledging that poor [working conditions](#) may have arisen due to production demands and that a review was to immediately take place.

"We frequently review our manufacturing facilities regarding overtime work. We will re-evaluate working hour practices," said spokesman James Chung. "When new production lines are completed or new products are launched, high demand has led to overtime work."

But the company denied allegations that it used child labor, saying it has "zero tolerance" for the hiring of underage workers.

According to China Labor Watch's report, overtime for some employees reached or exceeded 100 hours per month, with some employees having only one day off a month.

The report also said that while Samsung suppliers Tianjin Intops Co. and Tianjin Chaarmtech Electronics Co. complied with minimum wage laws—workers were paid the base monthly salary of 1,310 renminbi or \$206—the pay was so low that many workers were compelled to work overtime.

"Dependence on overtime work is characteristic of workers at almost every investigated factory," the report said.

The group also claimed that Samsung or its suppliers knew that Chinese underage youths were using forged identity cards to get jobs. Hiring children under the age of 16 is illegal in China.

The group's report said that "the factory did not take any actions to prevent the hiring of child workers even when they know about them." Samsung also failed to provide a way for workers to lodge complaints.

"Even when they suffered unfair treatment, workers at almost factory lacked any effective channel by which to express grievances to management," the report said.

China Labor Watch said it investigated eight plants in China that produce cellphones, media players, DVD players, TV components, mobile displays, printers, home appliances and cellphone casings for Samsung. They hire more than 24,000 workers combined.

Investigators entered the factories undercover or interviewed workers outside the factories.

Earlier this week, in response to China Labor Watch's allegation that Samsung supplier HEG Electronics used child labor, Samsung said it will audit working conditions at around 250 Chinese companies in its supply chain by the end of this year.

It vowed to terminate contracts if any labor abuses or violations of its policies are found. But the company denied the presence of child workers under 16 at HEG Electronics.

The allegations faced by Samsung are reminiscent of a [labor](#) scandal that recently dogged Apple.

A flurry of worker suicides at Foxconn Technology Group, Apple's largest supplier, drew attention to conditions faced by workers in China who put iPhones and other devices together.

The world's two largest smartphone makers are embroiled in patent fights in 10 countries. Last month, a jury slammed Samsung with a \$1 billion judgment after finding the company had willfully copied Apple's iPhone and iPad. Samsung is appealing.

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