



## **Sumangali in India: illegal and unacceptable**

### **The Sumangali system in India:**

In 2007, C&A first became aware of the system known as Sumangali in the Southern Indian State of Tamil Nadu. Given a shortage of labour in the region, especially for workers in the spinning mills, young women accept 3 year contracts for work, not knowing that the working and living conditions attached to such jobs fall far short of what is acceptable under Indian law and to the wider International Community. It is a widespread custom in India that women have to provide a sum of money as a dowry when they get married. By taking on this work the women hope to earn enough money to be able to marry sometime in the future. However, a large proportion of their wages is held back, and not paid out until after the end of the contract – if at all. Up to that point the women are at the mercy of their employers. They are not permitted to change job, and are forced to accept all work and whatever conditions are imposed, even though Sumangali is illegal under Indian Law, too.

### **C&A clearly condemns the Sumangali system:**

Sumangali is an illegal and inhuman system which we do not accept under any circumstances.

- Our independently operating corporate Auditing Partner SOCAM inspects the sewing factories without prior notice, including their subcontractors.
- However, this does not apply to the earlier parts of our supply chain, especially the Southern Indian spinning mills. Our inspectors have no legal right to be able to enter companies with whom we have no direct contractual relationship.
- There is an urgent need for action in the interest of the young women affected. Without the support of local partners, however, it will not be possible to abolish the system.
- That's why we are cooperating with various initiatives to fight the Sumangali system.
- The Sumangali system can only be solved through common action by companies, local manufacturers, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and official bodies. We strongly support this approach and cooperate, among others, with "terre des hommes", the "Ethical Trade Initiative (ETI)" and the "Brands Ethical Working Group".

### **C&A's commitment against Sumangali: An overview**

- We firstly learned about Sumangali in 2007
- At around the same time our independent operating auditing partner SOCAM found evidence of such a system at a supplier in South India. The account was suspended immediately and when it became evident that the supplier was not willing to change this practice, the account was eventually closed by us.



- As result we invited all of our contractual manufacturing suppliers to a conference in Tirupur/South India informing them that Sumangali was not acceptable at all and could lead to an ending of our business relationship should we find that the situation exists in their own operations.
- In 2010 Anti Slavery International completed a study on Sumangali in India which clearly showed that Sumangali had moved to the earlier parts of the textile chain and therefore out of the view of our auditing company.
- To help eliminate the inter-sectoral problem of Sumangali we joined several initiatives:
- For example within Europe C&A has been an active participant in a forum under the auspices of the Ethical Trade Initiative (ETI), seeking a collaborative approach with other brands and NGOs in helping to abolish the system of Sumangali in India
- Within India, C&A is part of the Brands Ethical Working Group, itself part of a multi-stakeholder body known as the Tirupur Stakeholder Forum, who share the concerns of the brands and are able to support the objective to abolish the Sumangali Scheme from an Indian perspective.
- In addition, the company is funding a 'terre des hommes' project over the coming four years. It aims to provide some 9.000 young women with an alternative to working under this system through education.