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### **Fashion Watchdog:**

in the garment industry this issue has been extensively reported on for years. Indeed, in 2019 the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee highlighted that the UK's largest fashion retailers had "chased the cheap needle around the planet", commissioning production in countries with low pay and little trade union representation", and where poverty pay and conditions are standard for garment workers, most of whom are women. It also noted the labour exploitation taking place in the industry here in the UK.

I appreciate the arguments Transform Trade has made in calling for a fashion watchdog, particularly in highlighting the impact of the Groceries Code Adjudicator in reducing abusive purchasing practices in the food sector. I also note that in 2021 the Environmental Audit Committee wrote to the Government calling for it to explore and consult on a Garment Trade Adjudicator.

In its response to the Committee, the Government noted the proposal for a fashion watchdog and said it would consider this question. However, it now argues that while the adjudicator model has been successful in the groceries sector, differences between that sector and the fashion industry "call into question how effectively the model can be transferred." It says it will continue to review this issue and consider options to drive up standards across the sector. As it does so, I hope it will give proper weight to the crucial points highlighted by Transform Trade. I can assure you that I will continue to monitor this issue.

More widely, I believe we should use the UK's trade policy to put workers first, both at home and abroad. This could include making clauses on workers' rights a core negotiating objective in new trade agreements; enforcing available penalties for violations of commitments to workers' rights in existing trade deals; requiring the Government to report annually on workers' rights in every country enjoying favourable trade terms with the UK; and expanding the scope of due diligence laws to impose fines on UK companies who import goods into the UK produced in violation of international standards on forced and child labour.

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