

## **PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Friday 1 November 2013**

### **New business and human rights programme for Rajasthan sandstone sector**

UK building, construction and landscaping sector leaders yesterday learned about a new business and human rights programme in the export sandstone sector of Rajasthan, India.

The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) and member companies, trade unions and NGOs shared details of their new programme to tackle labour rights issues within the Rajasthan sandstone sector. The group has recently launched a two-year project, working with India-based stakeholders to advance the human rights agenda within this sector.

ETI Head of Programmes, Debbie Coulter, said: “Workers in Rajasthan’s sandstone sector face a number of challenges, with reports highlighting issues of forced and bonded labour and grave health and safety concerns. The event offered an important opportunity to share what we know with UK industry representatives, highlighting how our members are proactively working with local industry to improve working conditions.”

The project builds on work that ETI members have undertaken within their Rajasthan sandstone supply chains. During the past year, ETI and members undertook extensive in-country research and stakeholder engagement, including a number of meetings and field visits. This highlighted that while Western markets demand compliance with labour codes and standards, these were often not well enforced by the local industry.

Debbie Coulter said: “Our project focuses on improving sector-wide capacity to address business and human rights issues. The focus is very practical; we will be developing tools and resources that quarry and stone processing yard owners can use, to embed human rights principles within their core business activities. Our aim is that this will lead to grievance mechanisms being better integrated into business procedures, so that workers have stronger channels for making their voices heard.”

The project is being driven forward by 12 ETI company members that import sandstone from Rajasthan for UK and European markets, along with ETI trade union and NGO representatives. It sees these members combine their collective influence within the Rajasthan sandstone sector in order to drive positive, sustainable change for workers.

Chris Harrop, Chair of United Nations Global Compact in the UK and Group Marketing Director & Director of Sustainability of Marshalls, said: “The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights places new expectations on governments and businesses, in terms of upholding respect for workers’ rights within global supply chains. This is a pioneering project; you are seeing UK and European stone importers joining forces, intent on upholding their pledge to workers within the Rajasthan sandstone supply chain.”

Duncan Robertson, Production Planner at Brett Landscaping, said: “We joined ETI around 5 years ago as a means to understanding issues in our supply chains and what we could do to drive change. Being a member of ETI, as a group and as a collective, gives us the means to contribute to real and lasting change for the lives of those workers supplying us with products.”

**ENDS**

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## **Notes to editors**

***Photo of Debbie Coulter, Chris Harrop and Duncan Robertson available upon request.***

### **About ETI:**

- The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) is a leading alliance of companies, trade unions and NGOs that promotes respect for workers' rights worldwide.
- ETI's vision is a world where all workers are free from exploitation and discrimination, and work in conditions of freedom, security and equity.
- ETI has more than 80 company members, which have a combined annual turnover of £179 billion. More than 10 million workers worldwide are reached through ETI members' ethical trade activities.
- ETI member companies adopt the ETI Base Code, which is founded on the conventions of the International Labour Organisation and is an internationally recognised code of labour practice. Member companies commit to implementing the Base Code across their supply chain.
- Trade union members contribute to ETI by providing their perspectives and experience as representative organisations of workers, while NGO members help ensure the voices of vulnerable workers are heard, to deepen understanding of working conditions.

### **Rajasthan sandstone project background:**

- The state of Rajasthan is one of India's largest producers of sandstone. Whilst the majority of this stone stays within India's domestic market, around 4 percent is shipped to the UK and Europe, ending up in driveways, patios and pavements.
- NGO and media reports have shone a spotlight on working conditions within this sector, with allegations of forced and bonded labour in some quarries, as well as suggestions of breaches of other international labour standards.
- Other workers' rights issues include limited access to social security systems and a limited application of health and safety standards.
- The project aims to raise awareness of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights among a variety of stakeholders and strengthen the capacity of both businesses and government to address labour issues in the supply chain.
- Engagement with local industry is an important aspect of the project. The project aims to establish a locally-run, sustainable model that will ensure the human rights agenda progresses in the Rajasthan sandstone sector and beyond.

### **Participating organisations:**

#### **Companies**

Beltrami  
Brett  
CED  
DNS Stones  
Hardscape  
London Granite  
London Stone  
Marshalls  
Natural Paving  
Pavestone  
Stone Masters  
Strata Stones

#### **NGOs**

Dalit Solidarity Network

#### **Trade union representation**