

Ethical and Sustainable Fashion
Question for Short Debate

19th March 2013
7.30 pm

Asked By **Baroness Young of Hornsey**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what support they will give to the promotion of ethical and sustainable fashion.

Baroness Young of Hornsey: My Lords, I am pleased to open this second debate on ethics and sustainability in fashion, especially as there is a full-page account of a round-table discussion on the subject in today's *Guardian*. I am particularly grateful to colleagues on the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Ethics and Sustainability in Fashion for their hard work and to the Centre for Sustainable Fashion for providing a secretariat alongside MADE-BY. Special thanks go to Dilys Williams, the head of the CSF, for bringing me up to date on key developments.

Fashion is about so much more than the clothes we wear. It may be an expression of our professional and personal identities, an expression of where and how we see ourselves in relation to our peer group, our cultures, our families and communities, and an expression of our creativity and our sense of fun. However consciously or otherwise we do it, as we dress, so we make a statement, even if the statement is, "I don't care or think about what I wear".

In spite of its importance in so many people's lives, the perception persists that fashion is frivolous and inherently ephemeral. However, better than most, the Minister will be aware of the size of the UK fashion industry and of its contribution to the economy. The estimated amount spent on clothing in the UK in 2011 was £43.9 billion. Despite the high level of garment manufacture carried out overseas, the estimated value of UK-manufactured clothing and textiles in the UK was £8.1 billion in 2011, and the overall estimated export value of UK clothing and textiles was £7.3 billion.

If we take the volume of clothing sales and look at the global nature of the supply chain, and then start to unpack what that means in terms of the relationship between the environment and consumption, a worrying picture emerges. The Waste and Resources Action Programme, known as WRAP, reported in *Valuing Our Clothes* that we have stashed away in our wardrobes some £30 billion-worth of clothes, unused for at least

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a year. About a third of the clothing we no longer need ends up in landfill—that is, around 350,000 tonnes or an estimated £140 million-worth of used clothes. On average, the global water footprint of a UK household's clothing exceeds 200,000 litres a year—enough to fill more than 1,000 bathtubs to capacity.

We have to work much harder and be more creative and inventive about how we tackle these problems. Not enough of us make connections between "fast fashion" and climate change, environmental degradation, labour issues in developing countries and resource scarcity. This is

not to suggest that nothing is being done. On the contrary, parts of the fashion sector supply chain and increasingly aware consumers, campaigners and legislators have embraced a range of measures, instruments and strategies to mitigate the damage caused by our current practices and processes.

Last month, I was in Copenhagen, where I gave a presentation to Danish MPs on the APPG on Ethics and Sustainability in Fashion, which I chair. Jonas Eder-Hansen, the director of NICE, the Nordic countries' umbrella group promoting sustainable fashion, and Michael Schragger of the Sustainable Fashion Academy work with Ministers and MPs from Sweden and Denmark, as well as representatives from the industry, to develop and deliver sustainable business models and other strategies to take us forward.

Here in the UK, the work of Defra and WRAP in promoting the Sustainable Clothing Action Plan, known as SCAP, is seen as a model of good practice and held in high esteem internationally. Indeed, WRAP and Defra were presented with the Global Leadership Award in Sustainable Apparel by the Swedish Sustainable Fashion Academy in Stockholm last month. At the event, I found a strong appetite for collaborating internationally with politicians and the sector. All of us are aware that in our contemporary, globalised world, pollution and unsavoury labour practices are no respecters of national boundaries.

Industrial dyes are a case in point. For a start, fabrics are dipped or washed in dyes that are made using copious amounts of precious water. In spite of regulations intended to ensure that the excess, dye-laden water is treated before being disposed of, it is cheaper to dump the dye effluent than to clean and reuse it. The *Wall Street Journal's* report on an instance of severe pollution in China where a river literally ran red makes chilling reading. Of course, by not treating water, costs are kept low, as demanded by large retailers wanting to sell cheap clothes to their customers in the USA and Europe.

Consumers need to make the links between their desire for cheap clothing and the loss of livelihoods through depleted, polluted fishing stocks and ever diminishing food and water resources. Add to that the fact that more than 400 people have died in fires in Bangladesh and Pakistan in the past six months, with at least one of the factories involved producing garments for a British retailer, and we have to acknowledge that our current mode of "enjoying" fast, cheap fashion makes no sense whatever.

Fashion today is both global and local, and even much of the produce of many of our high-profile "heritage" British brands, such as Burberry, Aquascutum and Crombie, is often all or mostly made outside the

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UK. The global nature of the fashion industry means that it is imperative that we work with colleagues internationally to secure more effective international standards on, for example, sophisticated factory inspection measures, labelling countries of origin and instituting traceability mechanisms and so on. Thanks to the horsemeat scandal, the general public is becoming acquainted with the unforeseen complications brought about by globalised processing and trading practices. The longer and more dispersed the supply chain, the more difficult it is to ensure transparency and accountability.

One equivalent to the horsemeat issue, if I may put it that way, in clothing terms is cotton. There are many people who would not wish to wear garments made from cotton harvested by children forced to work in the cotton fields of Uzbekistan instead of attending school-I should declare an interest here as a patron of Anti-Slavery International, which has worked ceaselessly to try to persuade Governments and the EU to work harder to stop this practice-but it is impossible to know the source of your shirt, skirt or trousers. Yet some of our largest fashion retailers will not undertake to demand that the companies in their supply chain stop using cotton gathered by state-sponsored forced labour.

Businesses and consumers alike can be powerful agents of change, and it is clear that education and awareness-raising have a crucial role to play. However, there is also a need for leadership from government in hosting platforms for initiatives, supporting change-makers and investigating the risks of not thinking through the consequences for environmental sustainability. This leadership role should also be concerned with working in partnership to educate consumers and skill up young people on manufacturing and other skills, as well as investing in sustainable fashion SMEs and other projects focused on a sustainable future still infused with excitement, individuality and style.

We have all the incentives we need to act and to act quickly, and we have the individuals and organisations with the talent, so what more can government and politicians do to enhance the effectiveness and reach of these people? Clear, vocal leadership is important, and government Ministers and their officials can fulfil a useful role in supporting initiatives across the spectrum of departments with a stake in finding solutions to the problems we have created. The Sustainable Clothing Action Plan is a good example of government leadership, with an NGO and industry working together to find solutions to complex problems.

I cannot mention all the different departments that could have some sort of purchase on this issue. Some time ago, DfID, for example, introduced the Responsible and Accountable Garment Sector Challenge Fund. Fashion, of course, lies within the DCMS's remit. It is also within the BIS agenda because of the manufacturing element and also because of the potential of the Green Investment Bank. In fact, in November last year, Business Secretary Vince Cable promised government support to breathe new life into UK textile manufacturing as a study revealed that the cost gap with Asia is narrowing. Can the Minister tell the House how far such plans have gone and the extent to which sustainability

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and ethics in fashion is a priority consideration? Other departments, such as the MoD or the Department of Health, can support sustainable clothing via the purchase of uniforms and so on through ethical procurement procedures.

Will the Minister undertake to set up a meeting with me and other Members of both Houses on the APPG to discuss how we can best help to support the development of this part of the fashion sector? We need to get a commitment to develop practical, effective strategies across the different departments for realising the potential of rethinking how we "do" fashion. Because of its experience with the Sustainable Clothing Action Plan, Defra is perfectly placed to broker and animate the necessary discussions.

To end on a positive note, technological innovation is crucial. I look forward to the day when waterless production techniques, air-purifying textiles, as being developed by Professor Helen Storey and Professor Kate Storey, and closed-loop technologies, in which the garment is manufactured, sold and eventually reformed so it can go back into the manufacturing process, will be the norm. Then we will know we are getting somewhere. However, we should also acknowledge that there is no single magic potion that can cure our environmental excesses. We need multiple strategies and to work collaboratively and internationally to effect sustainable change.

At the British Fashion Council's Esthetica Showcase at London Fashion Week last month, a young designer showed the collection with which she won a competition for fashion designers. The material she had to work with was the discarded clothing and waste materials of Veolia, whose employees collect our rubbish and sweep our roads. It just goes to show that with support, creativity, vision, skill and invention, even the fluorescent strips from a refuse collector's jacket can be turned into a garment of true beauty.

Baroness Northover: I remind noble Lords that this is a time-limited debate and, if my maths is right, we have no spare capacity. When the Clock shows four, noble Lords have had their four minutes.

7.41 pm

Lord Young of Norwood Green: My Lords, with that fresh in my mind I will endeavour to proceed without hesitation, repetition or deviation, as they say. If every Member in the Chamber could examine the labels in their clothing, it would reveal the global nature of high-street supply chains. I am not suggesting we do it as it might cause embarrassment for some. However, I checked my jacket-not that I pretend to be anything to do with fashion-and I noticed that it came from Morocco.

I want to focus on the ethical aspect of this debate. I declare an interest as the vice-chair of the Ethical Trading Initiative, a groundbreaking alliance of companies, trade unions and NGOs. The company members include a large number of high street fashion retailers, supermarkets and department stores, with a combined turnover of £166 billion. The trade unions represent 160 million workers around the world and a wide range of NGOs, large and small, is involved.

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Every member is committed to the implementation of the ETI base code, which is founded on the ILO conventions. In brief, they state: employment is to be freely chosen, with no forced, bonded or involuntary prison labour; there should be freedom of association with the right to collective bargaining; working conditions should be safe and hygienic; child labour should not be used; living wages should be paid; working hours should not be excessive; there should be no discrimination; regular employment should be provided; and no harsh or inhumane treatment should be allowed. As you can see from the list, all the companies that are members of the Ethical Trading Initiative are on a journey in trying to ensure that workers throughout their supply chain benefit from these conditions.

If noble Lords think about some of the stories in the news, only too often unfortunately, such as workers being exploited and denied basic rights, and incidences of child labour, which have been uncovered in many of the supply chains of our high street companies, it shows how difficult it is to ensure that workers get a fair deal. These are workers whose lives are put at risk, as we saw recently in clothing factories in Bangladesh, where fire exits were locked. It shows what a long way we have to go. All of us in the Ethical Trading Initiative have embarked on a huge task in trying to open the minds of companies and consumers to the fact that clothes do not just arrive through a UK-based manufacturing process.

Many ETI brands and retailers which sell garments to UK consumers are engaged in activities that attempt to integrate respect for human rights and labour rights throughout their global supply chains. Working with sourcing states and civil society, UK retailers are at forefront of focusing on the UN guiding principles on human rights. On that point, I know that the UK Government support the UN business and human rights agenda and that we are awaiting a document on the human rights and democracy programme from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which is co-ordinating the policies of 12 government departments. I wish it luck in this. Can the Minister tell us when the document is likely to be published?

7.45 pm

Baroness Parminter: My Lords, on entering this House in 2010 I wore fur-free "non-ermine ermine". However, I am not just passionate about cruelty-free fashion, so I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Young, for securing this debate and for chairing with such pizzazz the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Ethics and Sustainability in Fashion, of which I am proud to be an officer.

Sustainability, green, eco, organic and ethical are increasingly a part of the fashion conversation. That is to be welcomed although I am not sure everyone has the same view of sustainable fashion. Is it a timeless, classic handbag I can pass on to my daughter—the opposite of the cheap, disposal fashion epitomised by Primark? Is it a dress made from locally sourced materials, with limited transport and a light carbon footprint, or is it a Fairtrade cotton t-shirt produced in a factory where the needs of employees are taken into account?

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The London College of Fashion defines "sustainable" as,
"harnessing resources ethically and responsibly without destroying social and ecological balance".

I like that definition; it does not go so far as to pin it down but allows the creativity of individuals to flourish as they interpret what it could mean for their business. As the impacts of climate change hit harder, with resource constraints and more severe weather, we need the clothing industry to develop the necessary resilience to satisfy the colossal appetite for clothing sustainably. The commitments from the Business Secretary in support of the UK textile manufacturing industry are very welcome but more needs to be done to future-proof the industry and to support sustainable and ethical fashion.

Sadly, 20 years after the first child labour and labour standards scandals in our high street fashion chains, we still face the same problems. Clearly, current audit approaches are failing. They rely too much on cheap, bribable inspectors. It is analogous with food supply chain issues, reflecting huge pressures to reduce costs combined with an "unlikely to be found out so don't worry" mentality. Some companies are trying hard to address these issues. One is BBC Worldwide, which refuses to rely on third-party certification and makes its own unannounced checks of its suppliers, has credible and enforced sanctions and promotes its speak-up line to managers and workers in supplying factories.

However, spot checks alone will not address all issues. The fires in a number of Bangladesh factories just before Christmas highlight a problem of ethical culture. During the audits the fire doors were open but when the fires happened they were locked. We need companies such as the GoodCorporation, which argues powerfully to encourage debate about ethics and culture in factories, to move away from blame, to push managers and to take more responsibility for standards.

We also need more opportunities to showcase best practice, such as the Estethica at London Fashion Week and the RSPCA's Good Business Awards, which have supported the development of animal-friendly clothing policies. Can the Minister say what plans the Government have to address this and to help give companies advice and support as they develop the standards to take on the ethical and sustainability issues, and to provide more platforms to share best practice?

We need also to focus on clothing, from creation right through to disposal. With around £140 million-worth of used clothing going to landfill each year, we urgently need to address the issue of reuse, exchange and disposal of clothes. I was therefore very pleased to see that the Government's consultation on waste prevention, launched last week, identifies clothing as one of the priority areas for action. We have come a long way with compassionate fashion, largely thanks to powerful campaigning by organisations such as PETA. Opinion polls show that 95% of Britons would never wear real fur and top designers including Vivienne Westwood, Ralph Lauren and Stella McCartney leave fur out of their designs. Even on the high street, icons such as Topshop, H&M and New Look are fur and exotic-free.

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Green is not the new black; it is not just another trend to come in and go out with the seasons. I applaud the work of the all-party group with partners in industry and government to develop a new space for fashion which respects the need for social and ecological balance and can help create more British jobs.

7.49 pm

Lord Patten: My Lords, the more alert of your Lordships may notice that I seem to be the only member of the Tory party Back-Bench fashionista tendency rising this evening. I do that for a number of reasons. One is that I admire what the British fashion industry produces. The noble Baroness referred to that in her introductory speech, and I will not repeat it. I also admire very much the creativity of the British fashion industry. About a month ago, I was very glad to be at my first ever London Fashion Week show, the Matthew Williamson show. I sat in rapt attention

on the edge of the seat: indeed, the seats seem to have been designed to ensure that you sat in rapt attention during the whole show watching the models sashay past. It is no wonder to me that the British fashion industry is growing and is contributing so much. Certainly, it is one of the top 20 productive sectors in this country, which has to be a very good thing. The imagination of the British fashion industry is also good. We can see a Matthew Williamson or a Stella McCartney dress being paired with something from Primark or Topshop. That has gone all over the globe, which is much to the credit of those involved.

However, I agree that the ethical issues must be addressed, and I have four points that I wish to make. My first point is the only one which I believe is unique to the fashion industry; namely, that the fashion industry has done a bit, but not enough, to discourage the image of the thin, verging on anorexic, and therefore ill, model in its shows and photographs and the casting agencies which cast these models. Occasionally, there is a bit of breast-beating about it, but I do not think that there is a continuing programme to discourage 13 and 14 year-old girls and boys who want to be models one day. Its message should be to eat responsibly, just as the drink industry should tell people to drink responsibly. I urge the noble Baroness, with her influence in the fashion industry, to press this hard.

My second point is that I do not think there is anything peculiar or unique to the fashion industry in the need to manage the supply chain properly and responsibly. It is not just in fashion that we see these problems; it is in the use of children in other parts of the world in manufacturing carpets and toys, as well as in the use of young people who are not very well paid in putting chips into hand-held telephones. A responsible corporation monitors the supply chain and makes sure that it treats those who work in it properly. Much more needs to be done by good corporations in this area.

Thirdly, a very good tool is to hand in the condign punishments available under the UK's Bribery Act and bribery legislation. UK companies which permit their supply chains to bribe and act in a corrupt way are those which do not treat their workforces very well. We should ensure that the Bribery Act provisions

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are implemented the whole way down the line. That would add to health and safety, and to better pay and conditions.

Fourthly and lastly, ethical and good companies are very appealing to customers, investors and the young of all sorts who go into the shops to buy those goods. Good corporations have the very highest ethical standards. The Prime Minister's presently absentee guru, Steve Hilton - I believe that he is now in the west of the United States-used to run Good Business. It was founded on the highest ethical standards. I look forward to welcoming Steve Hilton back when he comes to re-guru for the Prime Minister next year.

7.54 pm

Baroness Prosser: My Lords, I, too, thank the noble Baroness, Lady Young of Hornsey, for securing this debate. As has been mentioned, the all-party group has a very wide agenda. Included under the heading of ethics is, of course, the treatment of people engaged in the

production, transportation and sale of textiles and clothing. Shortage of time requires me to concentrate my remarks on just one of those areas, and I will focus on those engaged in production.

Let me start with raw materials, in particular, cotton. One of the most disturbing and difficult examples is that of cotton picking in Uzbekistan, which has already been flagged up by the noble Baroness, Lady Young. Uzbek cotton accounts for 10% of the world's harvest, ranking third in the world. It is, of course, a very important product for the country, making up 20% of its GDP and approximately 40% of its hard currency export earnings. The legacy of Uzbek's history with the old USSR, with its continued command economy, does not provide a happy situation either for the farmers or the cotton pickers.

A production quota system is forced upon farmers and that, together with the government-set price, means that farmers cannot cover their expenses. Lack of profit leaves no money for investment in machinery, which leads to a continuing heavy reliance on cheap labour. Incidences of minimal payment or no pay at all means that many adults go elsewhere to find work, often to neighbouring countries. The Uzbek Government then step in with a system of forced labour, mostly, but not entirely, made up of children. Some schools in the cotton-growing areas are forced to close between September and November for the picking season so that children, some as young as 10 years old, can be sent to the fields to pick cotton for seven days a week. Children in rural areas are required to carry out weeding of the cotton fields during May and June. The children who pick the cotton have a quota to reach which varies, depending on the local circumstances, between 60 pounds and 110 pounds of raw cotton per day.

This is by any other name slave labour and it is not confined to children. The Government of Uzbekistan also forcibly mobilise teachers, public servants and employees of private businesses to harvest the annual crop manually. Failure to comply can mean the loss of employment and/or pension rights. The Cotton Campaign has a list of demands for Governments and companies, and, of course, cotton traders, calling on them to use

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due diligence in their supply chains, to demand respect for human rights and to require Uzbekistan to abide by the employment conventions of the ILO, to which it is a signatory. In 2008, the country ratified the ILO convention on the minimum working age and the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

I hope that the Minister will be able to reassure the House that the UK Government will use their best endeavours at the ILO annual conference to bring this issue to the attention of the global community. Uzbekistan cotton is, of course, not the only area of concern to those campaigning for better rights for workers in the textile and clothing supply chain. Labour Behind the Label, an NGO which campaigns for better terms and conditions for those employed in making our textiles and clothing, calls for improvements in wages and in health and safety. It has joined forces with Asia Floor Wage in calling for a living wage across the region and has now widened its embrace to include work with activists in the USA, North America and Europe, but western companies must be more vigilant of the supply chain and take personal responsibility for checking the veracity of locally made claims that all is well.

7.58 pm

Lord Stone of Blackheath: My Lords, perhaps because of our society's destructive obsession with speed and short-termism, fashion is often neither ethical nor sustainable. In many fields we fail to consider the long-term effects of what we do: in politics, it is the next term's votes; in the media, it is weekly ratings; in business, it is tomorrow's share prices; and in fashion, consumers want today's new look. At Marks & Spencer, I was taught by the late Lord Seiff about good human relations in industry. We were not only concerned with the long-term satisfaction of our customers and of our shareholders who were often with us for life, we were also frugal with our use of resources. We used minimal packaging; we did not have fancy window displays; we used low-energy lighting; and even our relationship with our suppliers was that of a long-term partnership. We mainly bought our goods in the UK, but even when we moved some production abroad, we ensured that there was fair pay and good conditions in the factories that made our clothing. Home production is an issue to which I will return.

The consumer, too, has a role in this. How does he or she decide what to buy? A brilliant mind in this field, as was mentioned, is the designer, artist and academic, Professor Helen Storey at the Centre for Sustainable Fashion at the London College of Fashion. She is involved in a project that seeks to explore and understand more deeply the relationship between us and our desire to acquire. At the heart of the question posed by this debate lies our understanding of human actions in relation to material consumption habits. Here in the western world we are consuming and wasting at a rate that threatens our own health and that of the planet. The fashion industry exemplifies the complexity and extreme nature of human society's obsessive cycle of creation and destruction, but it is also a great place to find solutions. Fashion sits at a point that crosses economics, aesthetics, psychology, creativity and our individual notions of who we are. This research will produce some really interesting results.

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At this point I must declare an interest. I have three wonderful children. I tried to stop each of them following me into the shmatter business. Daniel and Jessica work respectively in charities and healing, but I failed with my youngest child, Susie Stone, who has a couture fashion business. She says that sustainable fashion requires us to buy less but wear it more and to spend more on good, bespoke, UK-made clothing, which in the long term will cost you less, suit you more and make you feel better about yourself.

On a grander, wider scale, the noble Lord, Lord Alliance, is working on a project to bring textiles back to Britain. He and his team have involved Manchester University, local businesses and regional and central government. This should be supported by regional investment and government grants. Tens of thousands of jobs could be created, so the investment would be cost effective. Within it, ethics and sustainability should be built into contracts to make them synonymous with "Made in Britain".

A friend who has a new factory in the UK tells me that some awful UK factories bring in people at night to work the machines. They are paid by the illegal "cabbage" system. They have no right-to-work documentation to prove they are legitimate workers. We need this stopped so that ethical trading companies with audited compliance are not put at a disadvantage. As well as criticising other countries, we need to enforce ethical trading here in the UK.

Finally, I am afraid we have uneducated consumers in this field. They do not know what is involved in making clothes well from start to finish in terms of skills nor what the costs of a retailer are in terms of staffing, distribution and running stores. The public have never been exposed to this understanding. Many companies in the retail industry tick the boxes in terms of ethical and sustainable initiatives but do not have them high on their agenda because their one-year operating plans are dominated by recession survival and the complexities of multichannel retailing. As we found this week with controlling the press and media, we cannot wait for retailers and manufacturers to put in place voluntary, sustainable and ethical reporting practices. We need to create laws and ensure compliance with them.

After the unchecked industrialism of the 20th century and in order to advance sustainable and ethical fashion, there is a need for reinvestment in the textile industry in this country, for transparency and information from brands so that people can make informed longer-term purchasing choices and for legislation and compliance monitoring from Her Majesty's Government.

8.02 pm

Lord Razzall: My Lords, it is not possible to overestimate the importance of fashion design in this country. From Stella McCartney to Vivienne Westwood, we are clearly world market leaders. It is also important that we should highlight the importance of ethical fashion, which was brilliantly highlighted in this House by the noble Baroness, Lady Young of Hornsey, and outside it by Livia Firth, who is better known in this field than her famous actor husband.

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We all remember the horrors of Primark, which were referred to earlier. It was accused of exploiting third-world employees to produce dresses that it was cheaper to wear once, throw away and replace with another than to dry clean. However, the big companies have begun to catch on. I commend to the noble Lord, Lord Young, and others—I do not know why I picked on him—the Gucci ecologically 100% traceable bag. It is not black but a burgundy brownish red because this is the best vegetable-sourced colour. The leather is sourced from cows reared without causing deforestation and the handle is made from bamboo that grows like a weed. Gucci may sell furs, but this bag is a start.

It is not only major companies that have caught on. The United Kingdom has Brora, which sources ethically produced fibre from the Mongolian goat and turns it into cashmere in Scotland. It also has People Tree, which started in 2001 and is recognised as a pioneer in fair trade and environmentally sustainable fashion. It both provides desirable fashion and works to improve the lives and environment of workers and farmers in developing countries. UK manufacturers do not just provide jobs. Barbour not only makes all its waxed coats in United Kingdom but is a major donor to charity. It has given away £8 million in recent years, including a recent grant of £1 million to Newcastle University for medical research.

What can the Government do? That is the Question put by the noble Baroness. I am not a great believer in government intervention, but if we accept that demand for high-end value manufactured goods made here rather than in China is good for the United Kingdom, the

Government could, first, encourage universities to concentrate courses on manufacture rather than just design; secondly, following the reference to Vince Cable, contemplate the creation of manufacturing hubs, or "catapults" to use the jargon, to encourage manufacturing; and, thirdly, in their export drives, promote manufacturers and suppliers of ethically produced clothing that is made here. They could also, as the noble Lord, Lord Stone, indicated, give a lot of money to the initiative of my noble friend Lord Alliance.

8.06 pm

Lord Giddens: My Lords, fashion is a huge global industry, as other noble Lords said, with a large carbon footprint. It has left behind it a trail of eco-destruction. Now, fortunately, efforts are being made to counter the existing structures of the industry. As usual it is the Scandinavians and not us who are in the lead, as they always are on environmental issues. I commend to noble Lords the work of the Nordic Fashion Association, which was briefly touched on in other speeches. It has a very wide range of projects and amazing coverage in the Scandinavian press. One of the main emphases of the NFA is eco-design: integrating sustainability into garments at the design stage.

Among high-profile figures in the UK, I commend in particular Vivienne Westwood for her work on climate change. A couple of years ago I went to speak at a literary festival in Hanover. I gave my speech on climate change. It was followed by the Handel opera "Semele", performed in the same long, elegant gallery

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where Handel first presented it. This was "Semele" with a difference. It was called "The Semele Walk" and featured models parading in Vivienne Westwood costumes. All the singers in the opera were also dressed in Vivienne Westwood clothing. It was a brilliant adaptation. She chose "Semele" because it is about the battles of the gods, and climate change is about our battles with the immense forces that we have created.

Sustainability is becoming important in the fashion industry around the world. There are many initiatives in North America. The annual Eco Fashion Week debate has been going for six years and attracts 2,000 people from the industry. Even more important is China, where the picture is very mixed. In some respects this echoes what my noble friend said about another part of the world close by. The turnover of the garment industry in China is about \$60 billion a year. Most of the money is earned from exports, mainly to the West. There are massive contradictions here. On the one hand, children work all hours to produce cheap garments for the western market. The film "China Blue" is a very good exposition of this. On the other hand, sustainable fashion is now talked of as widely in Hong Kong and Shanghai as it is in London. I admire the designs of Ma Ke, who makes beautiful, traditional clothing.

There are two questions that I would like to ask the Minister arising from this. First, all this is worthwhile but it seems to be nibbling at the edges of the global garment trade and it could degenerate into eco-chic concentrated at the high end of the industry. Is it possible to generalise it to the industry as a whole? Secondly, how do we get the big corporations more involved? As far as I can see, there are many corporations involved, but mainly their corporate responsibility department, which is usually a minor part of the business. We surely need

companies to be much more integrated in the whole design process to transform it, and I would welcome the Minister's comments on that.

8.10 pm

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall: My Lords, I join everyone else in thanking the noble Baroness, Lady Young, for securing the debate-it is indeed very timely, in view of the article in the *Guardian* today-and for her excellent and comprehensive overview of the issues. I am glad that the debate is to be answered by the noble Lord, Lord De Mauley, for many reasons, not least, and I hope he will not mind my saying this, because we could all agree that he is unarguably one of the most stylish Members of your Lordships' House.

I had not intended to speak-I should be singing-but I wanted to make a couple of short points. However, they have all been made by other speakers and so I will quickly pick up on a couple of matters that other people have spoken to and expand them a little. My noble friend Lord Stone spoke about buying less and wearing it more. That is absolutely at the heart of how we change human behaviour in this area. It will be difficult because in the developed world we have become addicted to over-consumption, and fashion is no exception. I am a complete serial offender in this respect. I have that wardrobe full of misguided purchases, to which the noble Baroness, Lady Young, referred, which were

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bought in haste and without due consideration. I am very ashamed of it, but unfortunately that does not stop me doing it.

We buy too much of everything because we can and because the market is geared towards high volume and low costs, as we have heard from many other speakers. We have largely forgotten how to value, restore, maintain and sustain the clothes that we wear. We are shamefully and shamelessly profligate.

This is a difficult issue for Governments of all complexions because the prevailing economic orthodoxy says that consumption equals growth, and growth is the only game in town. I can see that we have got problems but we should surely be wondering whether that model is itself sustainable. I rather doubt that it is.

Fashion, of course, is very much about novelty and therefore inevitably about consumption. However, at its best it is also about beauty, craft, skill and durability, and it is often about small businesses doing one thing really well. Does the Minister agree that one of things the Government can do is to put as much support as they can behind small businesses in fashion, as well as trying to persuade the large businesses to change their practices, which I do not deny is extremely important?

We must not forget that sustainable fashion is, of course, about sustainability, but it is mainly about fashion. If we do not get the fashion part right-that is, if the fashion that comes as sustainable is not as good as, if not better than, other fashion choices we could make-then it will never get off the ground. That is why we need small businesses that have creativity built into them.

My final point goes to the heart of how we can keep those small businesses coming: our education system. The system that we have at present, as we have already heard, has allowed some very talented people to come through and has allowed the fashion industry in this country to be world beating in many respects. If we do not keep the education system balanced so that the creative education necessary to allow those talents to emerge is properly sustained and valued, we shall find in a few years' time that we are not the world beaters that we once were. I would extend that into the higher education sector where, as I should probably have said at the start, I have a personal interest in the excellent work of the Centre for Sustainable Fashion, which has been mentioned many times today, because my son works for it. What he has learnt through being part of that team has engaged my interest and I hope that there will be more units like the Centre for Sustainable Fashion in future, and that they will themselves be sustained.

8.15 pm

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch: My Lords, I add my thanks to the noble Baroness, Lady Young, for initiating the debate and echo the thanks for her enthusiastic leadership and for the fashion inspiration that she has given to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Ethics and Sustainability in Fashion, of which I am also a member. I declare an interest as a board member of WRAP, which, among other things, as we have heard, manages the Sustainable Clothing Action Plan on behalf of the English, Scottish and Welsh Governments.

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This is undoubtedly a complex area in which it is difficult to be an active and responsible consumer. In the short time that I have available, I will highlight a couple of ways in which government can make a difference at a UK level.

First, it remains surprising that the Government pay so little attention to the fashion sector, as it is a major player in our economy. As the recent WRAP report, *Valuing our clothes*, identifies, clothing accounts for around 5% of the UK's annual retail expenditure, with consumers spending £44 billion a year on buying clothes, or around £1,700 per household.

Many UK clothing producers, particularly small businesses, as my noble friend Lady McIntosh identified, are putting ethical and sustainable fashion at the heart of their business models. They are making a point of celebrating quality manufacturing, greater longevity, respected craft skills and locally sourced materials. However, to expand further they need greater investment in production skills, improved training and a higher status, which would encourage the next generation to believe that the sector has a future. Will the Minister update the House on the steps being taken by BIS and other departments to build up our UK textile capacity and attract the brightest and best young people into UK sustainable textile production and design for the future?

Secondly, a wholesale shift towards sustainable and ethical fashion means that all the major production and retail businesses in the sector have to commit to change. I am very proud of the work being done by WRAP in the Sustainable Clothing Action Plan to sign up a list of companies prepared to work towards ambitious targets on sustainability by 2020. Already, major retailers

such as John Lewis, Primark and Marks & Spencer are involved. Together they are addressing a range of environmental challenges such as the overuse of scarce water in production, the fact that a third of discarded clothing goes straight to landfill and the short lifespan of most clothing with resulting demands, as we have heard, for endless new purchases to fill the wardrobe.

The Sustainable Clothing Action Plan is providing businesses with practical tools to deliver change, such as how to accurately measure the environmental footprint of the clothes they produce, how to design clothes with a longer active life, how to give consumers consistent information so that they can see the benefit of changing their behaviour and how sustainable business models can bring financial benefits as well. For example, it has worked out the financial advantages of retailers providing repair services for their own garments, extending clothing hire services, offering a buy-back and resale section within their stores and providing clothing exchange events among consumers.

I echo the congratulations of the noble Baroness, Lady Young, to WRAP and Defra on being awarded the Global Leadership Award in Sustainable Apparel in Sweden in January. Will the Minister confirm that this work continues to be a priority for Defra and that WRAP's work will continue to be funded? Will he reassure the House that, contrary to rumours, environmental sustainability will remain a key priority in Defra's current review of its priorities?

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8.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord De Mauley): My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Young, for initiating this debate on the promotion of ethical and sustainable fashion. I have enjoyed the contributions of all noble Lords and I will try to respond in a moment to relevant comments raised during the debate.

Although I make no claim to be a fashion expert, I should declare a vicarious interest by virtue of having a wife who runs a small but, she tells me, successful business retailing fashion accessories. Her range includes, I am relieved to say, sustainable products, notably some in the shape of handbags made from recycled offcuts of leather. She tells me that they are highly desirable. Of course, I am very interested in the range of economic, ethical and environmental issues associated with the fashion industry, which have been so well covered this evening.

As several noble Lords have said, fashion is a vital part not only of our national but of the global economy. In 2009, the United Kingdom fashion industry was estimated to contribute more than £20 billion to our economy and to support more than 800,000 jobs, so this is indeed an industry worth talking about. About 90% of the clothing consumed in the UK is imported. Our consumption has positive economic effects in developing countries, but there are also a wide range of environmental and ethical implications to take into account. We need to consider the water, fertiliser and pesticides used when fibres are grown and the emissions generated when synthetic fibres are made. There are issues associated with access to markets and trade terms for producer farmers. There are concerns about labour conditions in clothing factories, sweatshop conditions and child labour.

As the noble Baroness, Lady Jones of Whitchurch, said, there are significant water as well as greenhouse gas impacts associated with washing and drying clothes and waste at end of life. As the noble Lord, Lord Young, said, we landfill around a third of a million tonnes of clothing every year. There are complex global supply chains. Although the issues are different, the recent and ongoing horsemeat saga has shown that we need to be able to trust all our supply chains, including, of course, the fashion ones. I will return to this in a moment.

We want to ensure that the fashion sector continues to grow. Several noble Lords, the noble Baroness, Lady McIntosh, in particular, spoke about small businesses, and I agree with her. I will return to that point in a moment. Last October, the Government hosted the UK fashion and textile manufacturing showcase. This was part of the Government's Make it in Great Britain initiative, designed to dispel the myth that the UK does not make anything any more. UK Trade & Investment is promoting UK products and services to customers abroad and encouraging foreign investment in the UK through its GREAT campaign. I hope the noble Baroness, Lady McIntosh, will be pleased to hear that Creative Skillset, the sector skills council for the creative industries, recently launched its first higher level apprenticeship in fashion and

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textiles and is planning to deliver 500 apprenticeships. My noble friend Lord Razzall and the noble Baroness, Lady McIntosh, both spoke about higher education, and I will return to that, too, time permitting.

As for environmental improvements, my department, with WRAP, co-ordinated the Sustainable Clothing Action Plan, which several noble Lords referred to. This is a collaborative effort with businesses and third sector organisations to reduce the environmental impacts of the UK clothing supply chain. The organisations involved include high-street names such as Nike, Sainsbury's, M&S, John Lewis and Primark, as well as clothing reuse and recycling organisations such as Oxfam and the Salvation Army.

This is a world-leading initiative, which has been recognised internationally. As the noble Baroness, Lady Young, said, Defra and WRAP have just received the 2013 global leadership award in sustainable apparel from the Sustainable Fashion Academy in Stockholm. I am proud about that and pleased that the noble Baroness was able to be there.

Government action to improve ethical standards in the fashion sector includes the creation of the Responsible and Accountable Garments Sector-RAGS-Challenge Fund. This fund helps projects that improve the conditions of vulnerable garment production workers. It is aimed at workers in low-income countries in Asia that supply the UK market.

DfID has also provided support to the Ethical Trading Initiative, an alliance that brings together businesses, trade unions and voluntary organisations and has developed a base code to define the minimum standards that member companies should reach. The nine provisions of the base code include that child labour shall not be used.

The Government, of course, need to look to their own procurement, too. The government buying standard for textiles was published in December 2010. It limits the levels of hazardous chemicals and encourages the consideration of durability, the use of recycled fibres, ethical

standards and end of life disposal. We are now starting a review of this standard and plan to strengthen it and cover additional issues such as demand management, recycling and repair, and we will work with the Government Procurement Service to embed the new standard in the framework contracts for use across government. We are working hard to ensure that the climate is right for growth in the UK fashion industry, and at the same time are encouraging businesses to move UK consumption on to a more ethical and sustainable footing.

I will now address questions the noble Lords have asked. The noble Lord, Lord Young, referred to the number of government departments involved. Ethical and sustainable fashion is a complicated topic, and there are roles here for more than one government department. DCMS leads on the UK fashion industry, BIS on UK business, Defra on environmental policy aspects, and DfID on poverty reduction aspects. We work together to ensure that appropriate links are made without duplicating or generating unnecessary bureaucracy. There are cross linkages between the initiatives. For example, Fairtrade, the ethical trading initiative, and DfID are all members of the sustainable clothing action plan steering group. Many of the

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businesses involved in the Ethical Trading Initiative are also involved in sustainable clothing action plan, and there is a joint BIS-DfID trade unit. In many cases it makes sense to take a wider geographical approach. We look at the broad range of issues in a particular country and identify opportunities for reducing poverty and improving working conditions.

The noble Baronesses, Lady Young and Lady Prosser, raised the issue of child labour in Uzbekistan in particular, I think. In negotiations about eligibility for the EU's generalised system of preferences, we understand that there are legitimate concerns about the use of forced labour during the cotton harvest season in Uzbekistan. There remains much to do, but we welcome this year's progress; enforcing a ban outlawing the use of children aged under 15 in this year's cotton harvest is a step in the right direction. We continue to monitor the situation and encourage further efforts towards full implementation of Uzbekistan's obligation under the ILO conventions.

My noble friend Lord Patten asked about child labour, and other noble Lords have also referred to this matter. The Government are committed to ensuring that children are not engaged in work that is harmful or detrimental to them. We know that this is an ethical issue—perhaps the issue on which, as the noble Lord, Lord Young of Norwood Green, said, UK businesses already take action. I also agree with my noble friend Lord Razzall, who has congratulated several businesses that he has named. We help by supporting organisations that enable companies to demonstrate their commitment. I have referred already to several initiatives. Let me add to the Ethical Trading Initiative and Fairtrade the UN Global Compact, which is a call to companies everywhere to align their operations and strategies with 10 universally accepted principles, including abolishing child labour.

We are working towards long-lasting changes that tackle the poverty we identify as being at the root of the problem of child labour. The noble Lord, Lord Young of Norwood Green, referred to the launch of the UK business and human rights strategy. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has led a successful process across government to agree the UK's first strategy on

business and human rights. Arrangements are being finalised for the launch in the near future. The UK has played a leading role in supporting the UN guiding principles on business and human rights.

My noble friend Lady Parminter asked about government advice to UK business on ethical issues relating to specific countries. I have already mentioned the strategy on business and human rights. This includes clear signposting to advice provided by different government departments responding to business feedback during extensive consultations when business requested clearer guidance on how to approach the Government for advice. The Government also provide guidance to businesses on how to carry out corporate social responsibility reporting on environmental and ethical issues. I think it is fair to say that UK companies lead the world on corporate and social responsibility reporting.

My noble friend also asked about audit and checks on the supply chains. Textile supply chains can be complicated, with many intermediaries, and UK businesses

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often do not have visibility along their whole supply chains or even beyond their tier 1 suppliers. That said, many businesses are working to improve this, and even without full transparency they can still influence the practices of their suppliers through their product specifications.

The noble Lord, Lord Stone, spoke about the role of consumers. I agree with him. Further action that consumers can take include buying pre-owned clothing, choosing fair trade products, washing at lower temperatures and recycling textiles. He also asked whether the Government would introduce compulsory reporting on corporate social responsibility for all UK companies, particularly in this area. UK companies, as I have said already, lead the world in choosing to report on their contribution to social, ethical and environmental sustainability. We support mechanisms that help them to improve their reporting and are keeping a watching brief on current trends towards more mandatory reporting in some countries.

My noble friend Lord Razzall raised the issue of encouraging universities to support ethical fashion. London is seen as a global centre of fashion, with our universities attracting students from around the world. In 2011, almost 18,000 students were registered on fashion and textile courses, and there were 190 apprenticeship starts in the fashion and textile framework.

I will write to noble Lords if I have not answered all their questions. To finish, there is no simple answer to the many economic, environmental and ethical issues associated with the global fashion industry. However, I hope noble Lords will agree that we are taking action and are making progress.

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