

Chairman's Overall Report

This panel discussion was about the Foxconn controversy, where 13 workers at Apple's Foxconn factory in China have attempted suicides this year, and 10 have succeeded. The main topic of discussion would be who or what is responsible for the suicides in Foxconn. I would first give an overview about the points that each speaker presented.

The first speaker was a European Human Rights Activist. He believes that Foxconn Electronics Company had violated the European Convention of Human Rights Act 1998, and that the suicides happened because of Foxconn's unfair treatment of the workers. He claims that Foxconn Electronics seem to have violated Article 2, which states that all human have their rights to life, meaning that they have a right to live. The workers live in a tough, hostile environment where there are harsh, poor and cramped conditions. The workers also receive low pay with long working hours. They live and work in a dehumanizing environment as it is very repetitive and monotonous, and they have no freedom by not being able to leave the complex, depriving them of seeing the outside world and a social life. There are also incidents of workplace bullying and he believes that no one should be subjected to such degrading punishment. Thus, the European Human Rights Activist believes that the lack of communication and care, and living and working in such a hostile environment added to the stress of the workers, making them view suicide as a solution for their problems.

The second speaker was the Public Relations Spokesperson of Foxconn. He was apologetic about the suicides that happened and wanted to address this issue by stating the measures Foxconn would take to prevent any more suicides. He feels that his company is partially at fault for the death of these workers due to the low pay with long working hours and workplace bullying, contributing to the personal psychological problems of the workers. These include having problems at home and yet not able to earn enough money to support the family. Thus, Foxconn intends to change the attitudes of managers towards the workers, and also having safety nets around the dormitories. There is also a 24/7 hotline, for counselors to talk to the workers and a stress room set up. Workers could also get a pay rise of up to 2000 yuan per month. He feels that the recent events have been regrettable and the company is making amends for not looking into the needs of the workers.

The third speaker was a family member of the deceased worker. He wants a proper explanation for the death of his son and believes that the cause of these deaths was mainly due to management inefficiency. He says that the cause of these suicides is partly due to mental abuse – long hour shifts, demoralizing reprimands, beatings, and threats of dismissal. The workers not being able to leave the working compound also isolates them from the outside world, depriving them of any social life. He also stated that there had been incidents of workers being beaten to death by security guards, and one of the murders was deliberately covered up.

The stress for the workers to rush to meet the global demand for Apple products and the monotonous way of life also depicts the workers like mindless robots. He also dislikes the strict discipline enforced upon the workers. There is pay docks for breaking tools and a points deduction system for little 'crimes' like yawning, talking or sitting on the floor. In short, the family member is against the military style approach used by the management as it creates psychological pressure for the workers and robs them of their identity due to the way they are being treated. He thus appeals to the high officials of Shengzhen and the management of Foxconn to investigate the truth and protect the basic rights of employees.

The fourth speaker is the Public Relations Spokesperson for Apple Inc. He feels that Foxconn is not responsible for the deaths as they do not breach human rights. He claims that the workers are treated with respect and dignity. There are also facilities that provide food, care and entertainment – that uphold basic human rights - to the workers, such as restaurants, movie theaters and hospitals. And even though the workers might have been pressurized by the deadlines and long working hours, he says that they never forced the jobs on the workers. They were properly briefed about what life would be like at Foxconn and they had the right to choose whether they wanted to work in Foxconn. If they needed any help, they could also have gone to the counselors to voice their opinions or family, financial problems rather than resorting to suicide. The workers have the responsibility to take care of their own health and well-being as Foxconn has already given them so much welfare. Since basic facilities, counseling, and respect are given to the workers, he feels that Foxconn could not be directly blamed for the suicides.

The fifth speaker is the China Government Official from the Trade Bureau. He believes that the reason for the suicides is due to the stress that is placed on them. The workers are subject to strict discipline, abuse from employers, and cramped living conditions. He also added that China labour laws allow workers to work up to 40 hours a week but Foxconn's limit is 60 hours, clearly showing that the workers are being overworked. He also feels the workers are underpaid as they are paid less than half the retail price of the products they manufacture. He believes all these unfair treatment to the workers led them to commit suicide.

The sixth speaker is a medical practitioner. He defines psychology as the science of the mind and behavior where it can help to examine how and what the workers were thinking before and during they attempted suicide. Thus, he believes that the lack of freedom given to the workers is the main reason why the suicides happened. The workers have long working hours but low pay and felt that they work in a dehumanizing place where everything is routine, making them no different from robots. They are also isolated from the outside world, with little entertainment value in their lives as the facilities in the compound cannot compensate for the outside world. Thus, he feels the living and working conditions of the workers led to reason why

