ONGOING VIOLATIONS AT ŞIK MAKAS/CROSS JEANS, THE UNION'S STANCE, AND SUPPLY-CHAIN RESPONSIBILITY

Şık Makas/Cross Jeans factory has been operating since 2014; workers are employed at the minimum wage level with no differentiation based on seniority. According to TÜRK-İŞ data (September 2025), the hunger threshold is 27,970 TL, and the poverty threshold is 91,109 TL. The 14,201 TL gap between the current minimum wage and basic living costs stands in clear contradiction to international standards, particularly ILO Conventions 95 and 131, and the sector's fair-wage commitments. The factory is part of the supply chains of major global brands including H&M, Zara (Inditex), Mango, Levi's, and Bestseller, all of which have public commitments on living wages and human-rights due diligence.

In August 2025, there were 2,317 workers at the Şık Makas/CRS Jeans Tokat facility; in the same month, 600 workers exercised their right to "just-cause resignation" after not receiving their wages. Over the last 18 months, more than 2,200 workers were either dismissed or forced to resign; departing workers were not paid severance or outstanding entitlements.

The 6 October 2025 Action and the Legal Framework

To address wages unpaid since August, workers on 6 October 2025 pressed their affiliated union, Öz İplik-İş, to take action. According to the Ministry of Labour data, approximately 1,700 workers were still employed at the time. Under Turkish Labour Law, non-payment of wages gives rise to the right to terminate for just cause; if the delay exceeds 20 days, workers also acquire the right to refrain from work. For these reasons, the work stoppage was both legitimate and lawful.

The employer and the union proposed payments at the end of October / mid-November / January 2026. Because these offers were partial and delayed, workers rejected them. The authorised union pressured workers to resume production, and some representatives physically intervened. Despite a brief scuffle, neither the employer, nor security forces, nor the police characterised the incident as "violence"; no evidence or investigation indicates violent acts by workers.

The "Violence" Allegation and the Practice of a Yellow Union

Nevertheless, Öz İplik-İş, acting in open collaboration with the employer, advanced "acts of violence" as the grounds for dismissals. This allegation has not been made by the employer, law-enforcement, or public authorities; it reflects an employer-aligned, unethical stance against the union's own members.

Moreover, while this structure claims legitimacy by reference to Global Framework Agreements (GFAs), it displays on the ground the typical practices of a yellow union. The claim that hundreds of workers simultaneously engaged in violence could not remain hidden in the current political climate; such an event would rapidly reach national and international agendas. Generalising isolated incidents is unreasonable. For roughly 1.5 years, similar

problems have persisted, thousands of workers have been harmed, and the authorised union has not systematically conveyed violation reports to supply-chain actors. The crises in Tokat and Çorlu have been reported in national media, and numerous protests have ensued. Even so, when employer-aligned / yellow-union sources are treated as primary information within the supply chain, reality is obscured and responsibility becomes easier to evade. This risk is particularly serious given that the factory supplies to global retailers such as H&M, Zara, Mango, Levi's, and Bestseller, whose due diligence systems and supplier codes of conduct require transparent reporting of such labour rights violations.

This picture points to a stalling strategy that slows or defers the process by relying on contestable claims. It is also foreseeable that, to cover its loss of legitimacy, Öz İplik-İş would produce narratives aimed at discrediting BİRTEK-SEN.

This Is Not "Inter-Union Competition"

The crisis at Şık Makas is not an inter-union tussle; it is a profound labour rights issue rooted in unpaid wages, unlawful dismissals, and the suppression of collective bargaining. BİRTEK-SEN's involvement stems from workers' direct demand for representation after the authorised union failed to fulfil its obligations and, at times, actively obstructed them. Hundreds of workers which are many of whom were formerly members of Öz İplik-İş, joined BİRTEK-SEN en masse due to wage theft, pressure, and threats. The legitimacy of this transition rests on the freedom of association as enshrined in ILO Conventions 87 and 98.

BİRTEK-SEN is the independent representative of its members and of workers whose calls for support it answers; it stands against practices involving physical intervention against workers. Hundreds of testimonies, official documents, and verifiable records support the claims and demands here. If there is any doubt, evidence can be shared immediately; absent such doubt, prompt action is warranted.

The Human Cost and Violation of Dignity

We are referring to workers who, for months, were already below the hunger threshold and could not even receive the minimum wage; who were dismissed under Code 22 without severance and therefore cannot access unemployment benefits. This is not a mere "delay of wages" but a crisis that violates human dignity and triggers social breakdown:

- Evictions, divorces, debt-enforcement proceedings, and forced relocation,
- Children unable to attend school/daycare,
- Severe psychological distress and suicidal ideation.

These conditions are inhumane. Presenting the employer's and the Öz İplik İş Union's impositions as "solutions" is misguided. Punishing workers with Code 22 for exercising the right to refrain from work due to unpaid wages, followed by pressure to accept the employer's terms in mediation "in exchange for lifting the code," constitutes coercion contrary to legal and ethical norms.

Mediation Impositions and Threats

Workers report pressure from Öz İplik-İş representatives as follows:

> “If you resign from BİRTEK-SEN and accept the employer’s terms in mediation, we will change your Code 22; at least you will get unemployment benefits. If you do not, you will get nothing; the factory will close.”

Imposed plan:

- Severance in instalments starting March 2026,
- August wages paid 23–30 October 2025,
- September wages paid in January 2026.

The employer has repeatedly circulated this narrow and delayed plan. When supply-chain actors present severe, on-the-ground violations as a “successful intervention” based on partial/biased information, the crisis is rendered invisible. Workers continue their resistance, demanding full payment of all accrued wages and entitlements; many have joined BİRTEK-SEN.

The Financial Scale of Extraction

As of today, unpaid wages, severance, and other entitlements total at least 750–800 million TL. This does not include outstanding claims of those previously dismissed without compensation. Wages for production completed at least two months ago remain unpaid. For workers living below the hunger threshold and revolving monthly credit debt, going up to three months without wages amounts to de facto wage theft. This indicates that new investments are being financed through workers’ expropriated labour. The approximately 1,500 workers in Çorlu are not included in this calculation. Moreover, this extraction is being normalised under the labels of “legal settlement/conciliation” via the union’s involvement.

URGENT DEMANDS

- Immediate, lump-sum payment—without delay—of all accumulated wages inside the factory.
- Full and exact payment of wages for all days of protest since 6 October.
- Annulment of dismissals and Code 22 records issued after 6 October 2025, and an end to this practice.
- Immediate reinstatement of those wishing to return to work; removal of all practical/administrative barriers.
- Full and immediate payment, without instalments, of severance, notice pay, and all other entitlements for workers who do not return or are not reinstated.
- Full payment of outstanding rights for all workers who had to leave in the last 1 - 1.5 years due to wage delays and still have not been paid.

- In all resolution and monitoring processes, recognition of BİRTEK-SEN, the union of the protesting and dismissed workers, as a counterpart; conduct negotiations with union lawyers and worker representatives, ensuring transparency and accountability.
- Within the framework of supply-chain responsibility (e.g., GFAs, ILO norms, due-diligence obligations), rapid activation of independent, worker-participatory monitoring mechanisms and an information flow verified from the field.
- For brands to act swiftly, the establishment and operation of an effective and coordinated pressure mechanism by international labour solidarity actors on brands is crucial.

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