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Ambitious Advocacy and Fair Futures

A Q&A with Sophie Aujean, Fairtrade's Director of Global Advocacy

Fairtrade's commitment to social justice and its mission to enable meaningful and tangible change across communities has long been rooted in the way it delivers impact. After all, Fairtrade is the certification known around the world for its [Gender Schools of Leadership](#), its efforts to facilitate [sustainable agriculture](#), and its commitment to the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs).

But achieving lasting impact also means affecting change among those critical stakeholders in the halls of power – the legislators and policy-makers whose decisions ultimately determine the fates of millions of people around the world. In this context, advocacy is key – key to swaying minds; building consensus; and moving the needle of social justice a little closer to the fair future Fairtrade has long been working towards.

Enter **Sophie Aujean**, human rights champion and Fairtrade's new Director of Global Advocacy. For Ms. Aujean, today's multipolar, polycrisis world means that certification is not enough if organizations such as Fairtrade are to affect change. Instead, a parallel push that marries certification with cogent advocacy work is needed.

"Smallholder farmers need ambitious legislation that can be implemented in practice," **Ms. Aujean recently explained.** "That is what Fairtrade and I are committed to achieving."

Born in France and raised in Brussels, Belgium, Ms. Aujean has covered human rights issues for nearly 20 years, working as a volunteer with Amnesty International on the human rights situation in Tunisia and the Middle East and leading EU advocacy efforts and programmes for LGBTI access to healthcare and education. However, it was during her experience at WaterAid, where she worked as EU Representative from 2018 to 2022, that she learnt about how advocacy can help enforce socio-economic rights for communities around the world.



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“My experience at WaterAid, where I worked on climate adaptation in the water sector, really fuelled my interest in exploring the intersections of agriculture, climate change, sustainable development, and human rights,” **noted Ms. Aujean.** “In that regard, Fairtrade is a perfect place for me as it ties together all of these important and relevant topics under the banner of advocacy and human rights.”

As Ms. Aujean prepares to wrap up her first 100 days as Fairtrade’s new global advocacy lead, we caught up with her to discuss her ambitions, her advocacy wish list, and what attracted her to Fairtrade’s mission in the first place.

Thank you for speaking with us Sophie and welcome to Fairtrade! What excited you about Fairtrade and inspired you to join the organization as the new Director of Global Advocacy?

Throughout my career, I have long been committed to working on corporate social responsibility through a human rights lens and Fairtrade’s work in this area was something that deeply attracted me. I also consider myself to be a pragmatic person and firmly believe that what matters is providing all stakeholders with the tools to protect, respect, and promote human rights. That’s something Fairtrade is very well-equipped to do with companies working in the global supply chain.

Moreover, over the last decade I have been increasingly interested in food systems and agricultural issues, especially as to how they relate to human rights and climate change. I have also developed a growing awareness of the existential challenges smallholder farmers face, such as food insecurity and income inequality. This interest and awareness certainly propelled me towards Fairtrade. And I am very excited to set up the organization’s advocacy efforts in Europe and across the globe!



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Why is advocacy critical for Fairtrade to achieve its goals and mission?

As an organization, Fairtrade is keenly aware that if we want a world in which smallholder farmers and workers become more resilient, enjoy sustainable livelihoods, and have more control over their lives, certification won't be enough. We need a parallel push for ambitious and comprehensive legislation that includes the right support measures for smallholder farmers and workers on a whole host of issues ranging from climate change adaptation and sustainable agriculture to human rights compliance and living incomes. Smallholder farmers need ambitious legislation that can be implemented in practice and that is what Fairtrade and I are committed to achieving. This multipronged approach that includes certification and advocacy is exactly why Fairtrade is the perfect partner for companies who are already looking at how to comply with upcoming legislation in the European Union and beyond.

Speaking about upcoming legislation in the European Union, what are some core advocacy goals that you have and what would you like to achieve?

It's a bit early to answer that question, especially regarding our upcoming priorities, but I can give you a sneak peek on what we're developing. Fairtrade wants to see climate policies that specifically look at the needs of smallholder farmers. We want to ensure due diligence laws include living income requirements, and we will call for laws on minimum wages that get us closer to living wages. We also will make the case for policy measures that ease access-to-market for small producers and will seek to make the best from existing multi-stakeholder initiatives to bring real change in producers' lives.

Right now, our priority is to map the countries and commodities that most require our advocacy efforts so that we can work on delivering the greatest impact where it matters most. We also want to understand which global platforms can provide Fairtrade with the most promising opportunities to deliver change for smallholder farmers and



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workers. On that note, it is very likely we'll prepare a stronger policy engagement ahead of COP28 to influence some of the potential outcomes.

Above all, we need to build on our successes while also identifying the gaps in our advocacy capacity so we can ensure Fairtrade's efforts are meaningful to everyone inside and outside the Fairtrade ecosystem.

What does Fairtrade mean to you?

Fairtrade is without a doubt one of the best pathways to a fairer and more equitable future for all. As a social justice organization, we offer a broad package of voluntary and binding measures that really make a difference when it comes to building sustainable supply chains that help protect human rights and the environment. What I find extremely interesting is that, while I have worked in the human rights field for almost two decades, these first few months at Fairtrade have provided me with a reality check on how human rights can be enforced in practice and given me an awareness that things are always a bit more nuanced and complex than how they initially appear. At Fairtrade, we acknowledge the complexity of the systemic issues we're facing in both the countries and commodities we cover. We know what's under our control and what isn't. And we know we need to work in partnerships with a diverse array of stakeholders to address these systemic human rights and environmental risks. But we also know – and, in my opinion, this is the most important thing – that with the right tools and investments, our actions can be transformative.

If you could achieve your one major advocacy objective, what would it be?

Our very long-term advocacy goal is that trade finally becomes fair and we are no longer needed. In the meantime, and hoping this happens sooner rather than later, I would say achieving living income and living wages for smallholder farmers and workers is one of our ultimate goals. This is a key objective because it is also about ensuring smallholder farmers and workers have more control over their own lives and



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that they can afford to prioritise the shift towards sustainable agriculture practices and climate adaptation and mitigation. This will in turn benefit everyone on this planet. Because we're all in this together.

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