



News Release

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GLCC calls on Governments for legal protection of the term “Leather” to counter the spread of false and misleading descriptions abusing the term that deceive and confuse consumers

During their meeting at the All China Leather Exhibition (ACLE) on August 31, 2017 in Shanghai, the three International Leather Industry organisations that form the Global Leather Coordination Committee¹ (GLCC) reviewed, among other topics, the issues regarding the protection of “Leather” against fraudulent use of the term in the various global markets. GLCC regularly reviews the state of play of regulations and standards and updates the ICT on-line Register² - a database that has been drawn up by members to ensure barrier-free good governance and provide guidance for global markets.

They note with concern the proliferation of oxymoron, applying the term “leather” to materials that are either synthetic substitutes made of fossil fuel derivatives or developed from a variety of natural substrates - be they residues from vineyards, the pineapple industry, or mushrooms, just to name the most recent bespoke materials.

At the 3rd ICT World Leather Congress held on 29 August 2017 also held in Shanghai, Stephen Jeske, Senior Vice-President of GST Auto Leather raised further concerns in the sector. He referred to the use of fantasy names by car companies for materials that mimic leather coupled with a total lack of transparency on the true composition of the component in the sales literature describing the materials that comprise the car interior. The confusion of the consumer is exacerbated at retail level by ill-informed sales staff who cannot adequately explain to the customer what these fantasy names actually mean.

With such practices the good reputation of Leather is increasingly diminished by unscrupulous traders - affecting public perception of leather and causing significant damage in the market, both to legitimate producers and consumers of leather products around the world. The latter have the right to transparent and truthful information on the goods sold or bought to facilitate informed purchasing decisions on the market and avoiding unfair competition.

GLCC acknowledged the excellent campaigns developed in Brazil by the Centre for the Brazilian Tanning Industry (CICB) for the enforcement of the “Lei do Couro”; encouraged the evolution of the Chinese “Genuine Leather Mark” implemented by the China Leather Industry Association (CLIA); commended the efforts developed in the USA by the Leather Industries of America (LIA) in the revision of the USA Leather Guides as well as those of COTANCE in the EU for the regulatory harmonisation at EU level of the existing national leather labelling rules.

Progress should be noted in regards to understanding the importance of the issue along the leather value chain, notably among major brands. Keeping the description of Leather articles free from abuse enhances the value of the product and justifies the premium price asked and paid for leather against synthetics or fakes. Persuasion rather than injunctions plays a crucial role in this

¹ ICT (International Council of Tanners), ICHSLTA (International Council of Hides, Skins and Leather Traders) and IULTCS (International Union of Leather Technologists and Chemists Societies) + links

area. Brands increasingly understand the business interest of transparency and authenticity in enhancing customer loyalty.

The leather value chain is encouraged to constantly monitor and report cases where the term Leather is abused or where new materials are promoted against it by comparing them against the few disreputable tanneries that blemish the leather industry's good image and reputation.

GLCC deplors such unscrupulous journalistic and marketing practices where the leather industry as a whole is depicted with the few well-known infamous situations that are unfortunately still evolving in marginalisation of the sector. Reputed publications would be well advised to avoid falling into such simplistic defamatory practices³.

GLCC reaffirmed its univocal position in defence of the ICT definition of the term Leather that exclusively reserves the right to its use for the hide or skin of an animal that has been tanned in order to become imputrescible and where the natural fibrous collagen structure can be clearly identified. It advocates consistently for the sustainable development of the leather industry and extends its support to the efforts of the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation's Leather Unit in the pursuit of measures that aim to eradicate environmental misbehaviour in the sector in certain countries.

For the defence of the term Leather, GLCC understands that only legislation on mandatory authenticity labelling of leather comprehensively curbs false and misleading descriptions, protects brands against unfair competition and empowers consumers for claiming compensation in case of deceptive practices.

GLCC calls on the EU to lead the way with an exemplary Regulation on leather authenticity on the world's largest consumer market as a follow-up of the success of the EU Footwear Labelling Directive whose rules have been widely taken up at global level ensuring a trade barrier-free, level playing field for the industry. It encourages the US Government to seek regulatory cooperation with the EU in its review of the Leather Guides.

The Global leather industry takes the view that production is limited by the supply of a by-product of the meat and dairy sectors, and that there is room in the market for all materials, provided that they are marketed and labelled accurately, without unfairly denigrating other products.

1. For further information on this release contact: Christine Powley-Williams – Chair of the IUL Commission of IULTCS
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³ Recent article of The Economist: <https://www.economist.com/news/science-and-technology/21727059-genetic-engineering-used-make-leather-without-animals-leather-grown-using?cid=cust/ednew/n/bl/n/20170824n/owned/n/n/nwl/n/n/la/58348/n>