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Boston's Religious Leaders Rally for Rights of Security Officers

Calls on Building Owners to Publicly Request that Northeast Security Allow Security Officers' the Right to Organize

Boston, Mass. (August 3, 2006) – A delegation of clergy and religious people from Boston's Catholic, Protestant, Islamic, and Jewish faith communities rallied at One Financial Center in support of security officers and the campaign by Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 615 to organize them. The delegation thanked building owners who have expressed a willingness to ask Northeast Security directly to not stand in the way of security officers' right to organize with the union of their choice.

Additionally, the group prayed for those owners who did not respond to their requests for help in moving Northeast Security and offered them ashes as a symbol of mourning for the dignity of the workers. The Massachusetts Interfaith Committee for Justice selected the site of One Financial, because its owner, BlackRock Inc., is one of Northeast's largest clients. In addition, when religious leaders tried to call to discuss the issue with BlackRock, they were repeatedly hung up on.

"One of the biggest roadblocks standing in the way of worker dignity and better pay in the security industry is Northeast Security," said Reverend Laurel Scott, pastor of Old West United Methodist Church in Boston, Massachusetts. "Northeast Security is the second largest security contractor in Boston and its headquarters are in Brookline. This local company is standing in the way of improving the lives and people of their own city. SEIU and religious leaders have repeatedly called on Northeast to enter conversations, to gather for a discussion. Northeast continues to say no. Since Northeast has refused to listen to the workers, we are now calling on building owners to help bring justice for the workers in their buildings."

"We talked to courageous companies, but, unfortunately, we also had some less courageous owners," said Rabbi Jonah Pesner of Temple Israel in Boston. "And that is why we stand specifically in front of One Financial, owned by BlackRock Inc. BlackRock is one of Northeast Security's largest clients. Companies listen to their largest clients, so BlackRock could make a big difference in this campaign for the dignity of these workers. But instead, they choose to hang up on our group when we called."

"Often building owners say it is not their place to stand up for workers in their buildings. But we are calling on the moral law – we don't accept poverty when we can all flourish in our great city.

We remember the saying – love your neighbor as yourself. When our brothers and sisters fall low, we must raise them up,” said Pesner.

"Today is Tisha Baav, a Jewish fastday to mourn the times that our community has fallen short. Today we affirm that our community can't stand idly by while hard working officers struggle to feed their families. We affirm that it falls on all of us to hold BlackRock and Northeast accountable and call for justice for the workers. We present these ashes in sack cloth to BlackRock, to mourn the dignity of the workers, and to pray for its managers to have a change of heart," Said Pesner.

“Unlike BlackRock, several owners have been receptive to our calls,” said Father Edward J. Boyle, S.J. of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston Labor Guild. “In their honor, we present this honey to symbolize the sweet taste of hope for the workers, who with your help hope to work hard and live decent lives. This honey represents the sweetness of our gratitude for the owners who have begun to see in their hearts that they have the power to help the lives of low wage workers in our communities.”

As conclusion to the delegation, Rabbi Moshe Waldoks blew the shofar, the traditional ram’s horn that sounds a call for justice and redemption. He explained, “On Tishabaav, we first mourn what is lost, and then we celebrate the coming of the redemption. Here today, we mourn for the dignity of the workers, but celebrate our hope that they will soon find the joy of working with the dignity of fair wages, benefits, and the right to organize.”

The delegation is being organized by the Massachusetts Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, Inc., a non-profit organization which calls upon religious values to mobilize, educate and organize faith leaders in the Greater Boston area on issues and campaigns that directly affect the lives of underpaid workers. Through Interfaith Worker Justice Seminary Summer Program, associates from the Massachusetts Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice have been working with SEIU 615 to advance the rights of security officers in the greater Boston area.

In a letter to several building owners sent in July, Father Edward J. Boyle, S.J. of the archdiocese of Boston, Rev. Laurel Scott of the Old West UMC Church, Imam Abdullah Faaruuq of Masjidun Li Hamdi Allah and Rabbi Moshe Waldoks of Temple Beth Zion wrote, “Northeast workers want to raise themselves up, and you have the opportunity to help them. Our traditions tell us that when one of us is poor, we are all impoverished. When we don’t raise our brothers and sisters, we are guilty of keeping them down. When we work hard, we must be given the resources not only to get by, but to live, praise, and dream.”

In February, SEIU Local 615 launched a campaign to organize more than 5,000 underpaid and under-trained security officers who serve as Boston and Cambridge’s first line of defense. Religious and elected community leaders, including Boston Mayor Tom Menino, Boston City Council Councilors Michael Flaherty and Chuck Turner, Cambridge Mayor Kenneth E. Reeves, Cambridge City Councilor Marjorie Decker, State Rep. Gloria Fox, and State Senator Jarrett T. Barrios have all publicly expressed their support for SEIU 615’s initiative.

Information about the “Stand for Security” campaign is available at SEIU Local 615’s website at: <http://www.seiu615.org/onthethejob/security/index.cfm>.

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