

Letter to the Mayor: Advertising campaign on TfL estate from fast fashion company Shein

Image of Caroline Russell AM

Key information

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Letter from Caroline Russell re: Advertising campaign on TfL estate from fast fashion company Shein

Dear Sadiq,

Advertising campaign on TfL estate from fast fashion company Shein

I'm writing to you to raise concerns about adverts on the Transport for London (TfL) network that, again, put profits before human rights and dignity. Currently across the network there is a large campaign for fast fashion company Shein – fast fashion is low-quality clothing, usually targeted at young women, sold cheaply that only encourages throwaway culture and ultimately ends up as landfill. I have attached some images of posters displayed around the tube network below.

As you will be aware, Shein was one of the companies questioned on labour standards in their supply chain by Parliament's Business and Trade Committee in early January.

The Shein EMEA General Counsel, Yinan Zhu, did not respond to any of the Committee's many questions about the company using cotton sourced from China, specifically from the Xinjiang region, which is notorious for the forced labour of the minority Muslim Uyghur people. [1]

Yinan Zhu also refused to answer questions on Shein supply chains or labour standards, something the committee condemned as 'wilful ignorance'. Concluding the session, chair Liam Byrne MP, said: "The committee has been pretty horrified by the lack of evidence that you [Shein] have provided today, you've given us almost zero confidence in the integrity of your supply chains." [2]

I have written previously to you about inappropriate adverts on the TfL network, including ad campaigns that promote countries where homosexuality has been defined as a crime punishable by death. Your deputy Mayor at

the time responded and told me ‘advertising and sponsorship from countries that may have poor human rights records’ would be reviewed before being allowed on the TfL estate. [3]

On 4 February, campaign group Stop Uyghur Genocide launched a judicial review to stop Shein’s Initial Public Offering (IPO) listing on the London Stock Exchange later this year, citing serious concerns about alleged forced labour in the company’s supply chain. [4]

Shein should not be allowed to advertise on the TfL network, when there are serious – and public – questions being raised about such appalling human rights abuses in connection with its working practices. I am shocked that the adverts were even permitted, and it suggests that TfL has no ethical safeguards in place when accepting campaigns.

I ask you to immediately ban these adverts that promote a company with such a disgraceful record and a complete lack of transparency about its business practices.

You have had many conversations with both my former Green colleague Sian Berry and me as we have pushed for you to bring in an ethical advertising policy for TfL to avoid situations like this. [5,6]

I further ask that you direct TfL to produce a proper ethical advertising policy that, at the very least, bans adverts from both countries and companies that actively harm their citizens, or provoke such grave questions about their human rights records.

Please write to me outlining what steps you will take to address these concerns.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Russell
Green Party Member of the London Assembly

[1] China’s ‘tainted’ cotton. BBC News, Dec 2020 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/extra/nz0g306v8c/china-tainted-cotton>

[2] Fast fashion firm Shein showing 'wilful ignorance' over supply-chain questions, MP says. BBC News, Jan 2025 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/clyxmkp2mj3t>

[3] Advertising on TfL property by countries with a death penalty. Letter from Caroline Russell AM, Apr 2019 <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/assembly-members/publications-caroline-russell/publication-caroline-russell-advertising-tfl-countries-death-penalty-same-sex-acts>

[4] Shein IPO faces judicial review challenge from Uyghur rights group. Reuters, Feb 2025 <https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/shein-ipo-faces-judicial-review-challenge-uyghur-rights-group-2025-02-03/>

[5] Short-term letting adverts finally banned on TfL network. Sian Berry AM, Feb 2019 <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/assembly/sian-berry/short-term-letting-ads-banned-on-tfl>

[6] Caroline Russell AM presses Mayor over TfL advertising. Caroline Russell AM, Oct 2024 <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/assembly-member-press-releases/caroline-russell-am-presses-mayor-over-tfl-advertising>