

# Researchers call out ‘misleading’ sustainable fashion rhetoric

**LONDON – The Union of Concerned Researchers in Fashion (UCRF), a group established to combat issues such as the fashion sector’s ingrained growth logic, has criticised the communications published in the lead-up to the 2019 Copenhagen Fashion Summit for “paradoxical or even misleading use of language in describing ‘sustainable fashion’ activity.”**

**The term ‘sustainable growth’ attracted particular derision from the union, with such rhetoric being described as oxymoronic language “favoured by investors and asset managers.”**

**The statement asserts that “it is important to stress that the industry has spent 30 years trying to fix the old system, and it is getting worse, not better.”**

**Global Fashion Agenda, the organisation which organises the annual Copenhagen Fashion Summit, has now responded to the UCRF statement, telling *Ecotextile News* that the industry needs such bodies to “bring forward reflections and make sure to create a lively debate based on their academic research.”**

Aside from the wording of the event’s communications, the UCRF has made public its challenge in relation to the event’s agenda. This includes the ‘Hidden Supply Chains’ panel session, which led the union to challenge the fashion industry to “admit finally that it is not capable of making this overly complex system traceable in a way that truly matters on a systemic level.”

The statement goes on to say that while it is a nice sentiment that details are shared such as the address of a factory and how many people it employs, many vital factors remain ignored. The union asks: “What can we know about the salaries and living conditions of the workers in a way that can affect consumer decisions or in any way make real change? What can we know about the factory’s subcontracting practices?”

‘The Power of Creatives’ session, too, is the subject of the union’s assessment. The UCRF statement questions the validity of the discussion’s topic, when “fashion designers, particularly those in large companies, are not the ones to tool up or make decisions about material sourcing, production processes and supply chains. Instead, many of such decisions are made with heavy influence from supply chain management and marketing where the real power is located.”

This, the union believes, is an important distinction, as “continually stating that designers have the power to create systems change not only paralyzes designers, but it takes business leadership and management off the hook.”

In response, the organisers of the Copenhagen Fashion Summit told *Ecotextile News*: “It is great to see such interest in the Copenhagen Fashion Summit programme.”

Regarding the role of the academic community in the debate, a GFA spokesperson told us: “We need researchers to bring forward reflections and make sure to create a lively debate based on their academic research.”

“Our role at Global Fashion Agenda is to bridge the gap between fashion and sustainability and facilitate action taking among leaders. We do this, for example, through Copenhagen Fashion Summit where we bring together all parts of the industry to accelerate the change needed. We facilitate more than 500 business meetings through our Innovation Forum matchmaking between fashion companies and solution providers,” the statement continued.

The Union of Concerned Researchers in Fashion was founded by professor Kate Fletcher, Centre for Sustainable Fashion, University of the Arts, London; professor Lynda Grose, California College of the Arts, USA; assistant professor Timo Rissanen, Parsons School of Design, The New School, USA; and professor Mathilda Tham, Linnaeus University, Sweden.

As a parting shot, the UCRF statement urges attendees of the summit to “think critically and to continuously ask questions.”