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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI) Rebukes  
Supermarket Giant Ahold for Misleading, Stalling Tactics  
in Response to Farmworker Rights Campaign**

**New York, September 1, 2010** – Ahold, a Royal Dutch company that owns supermarkets throughout the United States and Europe, is “dragging its feet on farmworker justice in its supply chain and attempting to co-opt the good name of a leading human rights organization, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), to cover its tracks,” says Cathy Albisa, Executive Director of the New York-based National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI).

Since 2007, the CIW has urged Ahold to sign an agreement to improve wages and working conditions for farmworkers in its tomato supply chain. The agreement would require Ahold to:

- support the principle of a decent wage by agreeing to pay an extra penny per pound of tomatoes purchased with that premium being passed on to the farmworkers who pick the tomatoes sold in its stores, and
- purchase from companies that adhere to a human rights-based code of conduct and curtail purchases from companies that fail to address the often grave human rights abuses that occur in Florida agriculture.

To date, nine other major retail food corporations -- including McDonalds, Burger King, Whole Foods, and Sodexo – have signed similar “Fair Food” agreements with the CIW. In the past year, the CIW's campaign has won the active support of several Dutch unions, faith groups and NGOs.

Adding fuel to the CIW's campaign, consumers allied with the CIW discovered earlier this year that Ahold was selling tomatoes from Six L's, an Immokalee-based grower associated with the most recent slavery prosecution to emerge from Florida's fields. Florida has been called “ground zero for modern-day slavery” by federal prosecutors.

But rather than join forces with the CIW to combat farm labor abuse in its supply chain, Ahold instead has chosen to respond to the growing public pressure with stalling tactics, launching an open-ended, ill-defined “investigation” of its Florida-based tomato suppliers and suspending all tomato purchases from the “Immokalee region” for the duration of the investigation. To buttress its effort to stonewall the campaign, Ahold has created the misleading impression that the CIW is somehow a genuine partner in this investigation, stating on its website that the company has “met and spoken with Coalition representatives,” and that “Ahold is gathering information from a number of sources including the Coalition of Immokalee Workers.”

In light of Ahold's tactics, NESRI believes it is important to set the record straight:

- Contrary to the implications of Ahold's website, there has been no productive dialogue between the CIW and Ahold. The CIW has traveled to meet with Ahold twice – first in

Amsterdam and then in the United States – but those meetings have produced no tangible results. Rather, Ahold has to date simply ignored the CIW's request to make its purchasing power part of the solution rather than part of the problem. In fact, Ahold has not met any of the CIW's demands and is merely seeking to improve its public image by trying to associate itself with a prominent human rights organization through the misleading suggestion of dialogue.

- Ahold's announcement that it has suspended its purchases from Immokalee and is "reviewing its relationship with tomato growers in the Immokalee region of Florida," is equally misleading. In fact, no tomatoes are grown during the summer months in Florida, meaning no tomatoes are sold in the Immokalee region until at least October. Consequently, Ahold's "suspension" has no effect at all on its current business practices. Further, Ahold has provided no information as to how long the review will take, what resources or approaches will be used, or the possible outcomes of the review.

NESRI's Albisa concludes, "Ahold must engage in socially responsible purchasing of tomatoes produced by growers that ensure basic human rights for farmworkers, and genuinely improve conditions in the fields -- not simply declare an all-out purchasing ban on the region."

Albisa continues, "The time for public relations games is over. Instead, Ahold must join the Campaign for Fair Food, sign an agreement with the CIW, and prove that it is serious about farmworkers' labor rights."

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### **About the CIW and the Campaign for Fair Food**

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) is an award-winning community-based human rights organization composed of farmworkers, based in Immokalee, Florida. The Campaign for Fair Food, launched by the CIW in 2001, seeks to improve wages and working conditions for farmworkers by demanding that large wholesale produce purchasers, such as Ahold, agree to pay an additional penny-per-pound of tomatoes to increase the wages of farmworkers who pick their produce and to purchase only from growers who adhere to a human rights-based code of conduct.

For more information, see [www.ciw-online.org](http://www.ciw-online.org)

### **About the National Economic & Social Rights Initiative**

In partnership with communities, the National Economic & Social Rights Initiative (NESRI) works to build a broad movement for economic & social rights, including health, housing, education and work with dignity. Based on the principle that fundamental human needs create human rights obligations on the part of government and the private sector, NESRI advocates for public policies that guarantee the universal and equitable fulfillment of these rights in the United States.

For more information, see [www.nesri.org](http://www.nesri.org)