

OPEN LETTER

21 April 2010

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President and Chief Executive Officer

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Transmitted by E-mail

RE: PARK DEVELOPMENT THREATENS LOCAL COMMUNITY (SHIBUYA WARD, TOKYO, JAPAN)

Dear Messrs. Knight, Parker, Godbout and Mayor Toshitake Kuwahara:

We are deeply disturbed to have learned from the Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN), part of Habitat International Coalition (HIC), and our local friends at NOJIREN (Shibuya Free Association for the Right to Housing and Well-being of the Homeless) and the much larger Coalition to Protect Miyashita Park that NIKE and Shibuya City that plans have been revived to convert the public Miyashita Park to the commercial NIKE Park. We strongly urge the global operations of NIKE, NIKE Japan and local Japanese authorities to immediately halt this project because of its harmful affect on the local community and the lack of consultation with those affected.

Miyashita Park serves as both an area of public participation and refuge. For the ordinary citizens of Japan, especially those in Shibuya and other parts of Tokyo, the Park is a traditional place where they can relax and exercise their rights to expression and assembly. Increasingly, since the global financial crisis, the Park has also served as a place for shelter for many of those who have not been able to access available temporary shelters.

Under the false pretense of public development, NIKE plans to convert one of Tokyo's key parks into an all purpose sports facility, with massive advertising space.¹ According to local reports:

The park will provide facilities such as skateboarding pipes and rock-climbing areas. The agreement between the Shibuya Ward Council and NIKE Japan provides that NIKE Japan will purchase the naming rights of the park, which is located a stone's throw from Shibuya Station—a prime location for advertisement—thus enabling the Shibuya Ward to benefit financially from the sale of the naming rights.²

For Nike this means more profits and advertisement sites and for the city government more revenues.³ Such a move serves as an illustration of NIKE's unbridled quest for profits, contradicting its responsibility to corporate ethics and human rights standards.⁴

Moreover, though Miyashita Park is publicly owned by the Shibuya Ward, local residents were not involved in the negotiations of this project. Rather, only the head of the Shibuya Ward and a few local congressional members made the deal with NIKE Japan, without consultation with either residents or the local congressional assembly. The project will transform Miyashita Park from a public space, available to all, to a private, consumer-oriented space.

We support all local civil society organizations in their demand that the city government should seriously reflect on its values, particularly its approach to more revenues even at the expense of the citizenry's rights, especially the poor. It seems that these authorities do not share what Japan's new Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama has claimed repeatedly in his 29 January 2010 policy speech before the Diet : "I want to protect people's lives." The Nike-Shibuya City plan puts profits over people's lives and rights.

In support of our local friends, we oppose the NIKE Project for the following reasons:

1. According to the renovation plan, Miyashita Park will be converted to a park expressly for sports enthusiasts. This means that a highly public space that people have been able to and actively freely utilizes up until now will be turned into a commercial space for the profit of one business. Persons who do not pay for using the park as a service, will be unable to even rest at the park. This will surely have a negative impact on society at large and generally the way in which people come together.
2. For many years, Miyashita Park has been known as a space where many citizens' groups hold gatherings, or as a starting and ending point for local marches and events. Also, it has stood as a life-saving place where many persons forced to live on the streets can stay. This plan would unquestionably deprive groups and individuals of a space for their freedom of expression, and for their daily lives.
3. This project has been forced onto the ward by Shibuya's mayor and a number of assemblypersons in a top-down manner. Neither the ward assembly nor the city planning council has been consulted, and almost no information can be found in materials that have been made available to the public.

The plan was supposed to have been implemented in September last year, but did not push through because of strong public opposition. We had hoped that Nike and the city government had come to realize the folly of their plan and to appreciate the impoverished people's and wider public's insistence on their rights.

Gentlemen, we strongly recommend that the plan to convert Miyashita Park to Nike Park be completely and immediately abandoned.

We look forward to your diligent efforts in this matter and thank you in advance for your attention.

We hope to hear from you about your constructive response. Please be assured of our highest consideration.

Sincerely,

C.C.

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¹“NIKEPOLITICS” at: <http://nikepolitics.org/>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.