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IATP Calls For Equitable Solution for Fired Somali-American Meatpacking Workers

MINNEAPOLIS — The rights of Somali-American meatpacking workers should be respected and the industry should work toward equitable and fair working conditions, according to the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP). Recent media reports have indicated that a complaint will soon be filed at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission alleging that over 40 Somali-American workers in Swift & Co. meatpacking plants in Grand Island, Nebraska were either harassed or fired for trying to pray at sunset.

IATP's Dale Wichoff, Vice-President, Rural Communities, commented:

“Recent reports alleging the firing of Somali-American workers at a Nebraska meatpacking plant have come to our attention. We write to condemn these actions and call on all concerned to work together to stop the abuse of religious and labor rights.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy has worked with Somali-American communities throughout the Midwest. As new Americans, Somali civil war refugees have arrived in rural America looking for work and a safe place to be with their families. Often they have come after decades of hardship and loss of family members and property. Many employers and rural communities have welcomed their arrival as a sign of hope for both their futures and our communities.

It is a challenge for all concerned to learn how to live with new neighbors who have very different lifestyles and religions. But when employers fail to respect the rights of any worker, they are failing in their legal obligations and undermining democracy. Rural America has always been an entry point for new immigrants into our country. And we have met those challenges by overcoming differences. It's time again to return to those basic rights that apply to us all.”

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy works globally to promote resilient family farms, healthy communities and ecosystems through research and education, science and technology, and advocacy. <http://www.iatp.org>.