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The ITMF & IAF joint conference underscores the importance of international collaboration

As the global textile and apparel industries navigate a landscape marked by volatility, rapid digitalisation, and growing sustainability imperatives, collaboration across the value chain has never been more crucial. The **ITMF Annual Conference & IAF World Fashion Convention 2025**, set to take place from October 24–25 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, brings together two of the industry's most influential global federations under one theme— *Navigating Uncertainty & Adopting Technology*.

The International Textile Manufacturers Federation (ITMF) serves as a global forum for the textile industry, uniting companies and associations from fibre to fashion. Through data-driven insights, annual conferences, and active representation before governments and international bodies, it facilitates cooperation, dialogue, and forward-looking strategies for a rapidly evolving sector.

The International Apparel Federation (IAF), representing apparel manufacturers, brands, and associations across more than 40 countries, champions smarter, stronger, and more sustainable supply chains. With a focus on standardisation, inclusiveness, and collaboration, it works to align global industry efforts towards resilience and responsible growth.

In this exclusive joint interview with **Fibre2Fashion**, **Dr. Christian P. Schindler**, Director General of ITMF, and **Matthijs Crieteer**, Secretary General of IAF, share their insights on the 2025 conference theme, the role of technology in shaping the industry's future, and how closer alignment between textile and apparel sectors is key to navigating the challenges—and opportunities—of a transforming global marketplace.

The theme for the ITMF Annual Conference & IAF World Fashion Convention 2025 is 'Navigating Uncertainty & Adopting Technology.' What inspired this focus, and what outcomes do you hope to achieve through this joint conference?

The year 2025 can rightly be described as one of unprecedented uncertainty. The introduction of reciprocal US tariffs and the ongoing back-and-forth surrounding them have created unpredictability across the entire textile value chain. It is crucial to discuss and assess whether—and to what extent—these disruptions might become permanent.

When it comes to technology, its adoption is essential for improving efficiency and sustainability. In today's industry, no company can remain competitive without a sufficient level of digitalisation. The Digital Product Passport (DPP), for instance, requires data from virtually every player in the value chain.

By joining the apparel and textile conventions, ITMF and IAF are sending the message that we need industry wide collaboration to better deal with uncertainty. Technology enables and demands collaboration in the supply chain at the same time. The bar of competition is set by companies which understand how to connect supply to demand and how to create flexible supply chains in a smart way. The interplay between apparel manufacturers and textile manufacturers is where this smart flexibility is created.

How do ITMF and IAF plan to align their strategic priorities through this

collaboration, particularly in supporting the global textile and apparel value chain?

This joint conference serves the members of both federations by fostering deeper understanding across the entire value chain. This benefits everyone involved. For several years, ITMF and IAF have worked together on various initiatives, such as the Standard Convergence Initiative (SCI). Earlier this year, we launched the Apparel & Textile Transformation Initiative (ATTI). The ATTI is a manufacturer-led, country-focused initiative to decarbonise the textile value chain and it is co-managed by ITMF and IAF. By jointly organising this conference and bringing our Boards of Directors together, we have laid a strong foundation for collaboration. And we will need this foundation, because it is easy to see that increasingly the competitiveness of both the apparel and textile industry will depend on their ability to work together.

Indonesia plays host to the event this year. What is the significance of choosing Yogyakarta and Indonesia more broadly as the venue?

Indonesia is a large nation with a vast population of 285 million people that is home to a fully integrated textile and apparel industry. Our host association, API, aims to showcase the country's remarkable potential. Yogyakarta was selected as the venue because it is a cultural hub in Central Java and close to many textile and apparel companies. Its proximity to two UNESCO World Heritage sites—the Borobudur and Prambanan Temples—also made it an ideal and inspiring location for the conference.

The ITMF and IAF convention have always had multiple functions. Hosting with a different one of our members every year gives many countries the opportunity to show their apparel and textile sectors to our industry leaders. And we choose inspiring locations for a reason. Good global networking works best in such surroundings and enabling the networking to take place is one of the main roles of our federations.

What opportunities and challenges do you foresee for the textile and apparel industry in Southeast Asia over the next five years?

Given the current period of uncertainty and volatility, it is essential to identify key medium- and long-term trends. The global landscape has changed dramatically in recent years. The WTO's influence on global trade has weakened significantly, while regional and bilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) have gained prominence.

Countries in Southeast Asia are actively strengthening such agreements such as ASEAN or the CPTPP, as emerging economies become increasingly important and traditional consumer markets in the US, Europe, and Japan lose some of their dominance. Mario Draghi wrote that the biggest economic opportunity for the EU lies in a further reduction of EU internal barriers to trade and the same thing can be said of the Southeast Asia. Lower barriers to trade within the region enable more competitive products, while also creating a bigger home market advantage. This will help domestic brands to grow, increasing the value of the industry and helping manufacturers to diversify further.

With increasing global pressure around environmental and social governance, how are your organisations supporting members in implementing measurable sustainability standards?

As international federations, ITMF and IAF do not develop measurable sustainability standards. Regulations differ across countries, leading to varying social and environmental requirements. However, ITMF and IAF believe that it is essential to raise awareness among companies about the medium- and long-term trends shaping sustainability and social compliance.

As mentioned earlier, ATTI, the joint initiative of ITMF and IAF, seeks to identify the business environments and frameworks needed to help the industry adapt and transform to meet these new demands. The legal framework for environmental sustainability leaves room for the

industry to decide what the road to compliance looks like. Numerous initiatives that make these decisions are brand- and retailer-led and we are actively pursuing an industry where manufacturers and their (national) associations have more room and a greater ability to determine how to meet sustainability standards. In the end, a collaborative approach to environmental sustainability gets the industry farther faster.

Audit fatigue continues to be a concern for manufacturers. What solutions or frameworks are ITMF and IAF advocating to simplify and harmonise compliance?

For more than eight years, ITMF and IAF have actively supported the Social & Labor Convergence Program (SLCP)—one of the most successful industry initiatives of the past decade. SLCP helps to significantly reduce audit fatigue by providing a tool to collect data for social compliance assessments. Beyond the field of social and labour, in the environmental sphere, we see new varieties of audit fatigue emerging, particularly concerning too much variation in what environmental data must be delivered and in what format.

AI and digitalisation are expected to shape multiple sessions at the event. What transformative technologies do you believe will have the most profound impact on the textile and fashion supply chain in the near term?

Digitalisation, in general, is the key to business success. The shortage of skilled labour is driving the need for automation. Digitalisation (e.g., DPP) requires reliable data. AI relies on high-quality data to teach the Large Language Models (LLM) and function effectively.

AI, in particular, is likely to have the fastest and most significant impact. It is remarkable to see how AI tools can enhance productivity for both companies and workers. ITMF recently conducted a webinar series on “AI in the Textile Industry”. At the upcoming conference we will share the findings and will continue the discussion about areas of applications.

Digitalisation and AI are capable of greatly enhancing the design and development process so that it can deliver the right products to the right consumer at the right time. Reduction of overproduction, markdowns and lost sales greatly improves capital productivity. We can see in the market already the power of the companies that are getting this right. Following the Yogyakarta Convention, the IAF will launch a webinar series on AI for the apparel industry in collaboration with Alvanon. Additionally, in partnership with the Amsterdam Fashion Institute (AMFI), the third edition of the *3D Next LuL* conference will be held in Amsterdam.

How are ITMF and IAF supporting smaller manufacturers or suppliers in adopting such technologies, especially in developing regions?

ITMF and IAF do not directly support individual SMEs. Instead, we work with national textile and apparel associations to improve the overall business environment for these companies. Initiatives such as ATTI and SLCP are valuable in helping SMEs decarbonise operations and reduce audit fatigue. The STTI (Sustainable Terms of Trade Initiative) works on behalf of all manufacturers, big and small, to see to an improvement of purchasing practices.

Given rising protectionism and shifting trade policies, what role can global organisations like ITMF and IAF play in advocating fair and open trade for the textile-apparel sector?

Trade policy has never been a core focus of ITMF or IAF. Historically, multilateral trade policy was shaped at the WTO, but over recent decades, regional and bilateral FTAs have become the preferred framework for trade agreements. Given the momentum and the reduced complexity, it is likely that this trend will not change.

How do you see international collaborations—like this joint event—strengthening the industry’s response to regulation, tariffs, and global supply chain disruptions?

This joint conference underscores the importance of international collaboration. Discussing critical topics collectively allows for a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities ahead. The perspectives of national and regional associations are central to these discussions. ITMF and IAF serve as platforms for dialogue, sharing knowledge, and highlighting the implications of key developments across the industry.

What strategies are being discussed to attract younger talent into the textile and fashion sectors, which are often perceived as traditional or slow to evolve?

To attract more young talent, the image of the textile and apparel industry must improve. It is often perceived as a declining, labour-intensive sector which is far from true. Automation, digitalisation, and sustainability demands are transforming the industry into a more dynamic and technology-driven field. However, this transformation also requires a more qualified workforce. Educational and vocational training institutions, in collaboration with companies, must create the necessary infrastructure and programmes to attract and develop new talent. IAF has a long-standing collaboration with IFFTI, the International Federation of Fashion Technology Institutes. Through our Education Committee, we ensure the flow of information between the industry federation and the federation of the most prestigious fashion management schools in the world.

Looking beyond 2025, what are the top three priorities for your organisations as the industry navigates global volatility and climate challenges?

The priorities for ITMF and IAF are to:

- Support our members with timely and relevant information—through statistics, reports, and analyses of industry developments and by means of offline and online events.
- Continue participating in and supporting key initiatives such as SLCP, SCI, Fashion Industry Charter, ATTI etc, and bringing the voice of manufacturers into these initiatives.
- Foster collaboration and dialogue across the global value chain to accelerate industry transformation.

How do you envision the textile and apparel industry transforming by 2030, and what role will ITMF and IAF play in shaping that journey?

By 2030, the industry's transformation towards greater sustainability will have made substantial progress. Circularity and Artificial Intelligence will be among the key forces driving this change.

Sustainability will have gotten more intertwined with better business outcomes. IAF and ITMF will help their members to spot the sweet spots—the places where people, planet and profit intersect. More often than before, manufacturers will be able to initiate the improvements that benefit them and their clients. Change will be driven by very large, often integrated, manufacturing groups and by small, nimble manufacturers as technology will make it easier to earn money with small quantities.

Global production and trade patterns will shift further towards nearshoring. Regions such as Africa and Latin America will grow in importance as sourcing destinations for the US and Europe. Manufacturers will more often reach final consumers directly, either by setting up their own brands, or by collaborating with platforms that connect them to where the demand is. ITMF and IAF will continue to play a vital role in facilitating dialogue, sharing knowledge, and supporting initiatives that guide this transformation.

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