



## Footwear & Politics

By Thomas Crockett • Apr 30, 2026

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Below are a few quick updates on a possible new 301 investigation into Vietnam and the current 301 forced labor investigation into 60 economies.

### USTR targets Vietnam for another possible 301 investigation



With the release of the [annual global IP report](#) (Special 301), the U.S. Trade Representative designated 🇻🇳 Vietnam as the highest level of concern for the U.S. when it comes to intellectual property (IP) ... higher than 🇨🇳 China.

**Tell me more:** The Trump administration classified Vietnam, and only Vietnam, as a Priority Foreign Country. The U.S. has used such a designation only a handful of times over the decades the law has been in place.

- **New 301:** This triggers an automatic consideration, over the next 30 days, of whether to launch a new 301 investigation into Vietnam.

**Complete surprise:** The designation comes as a shock, since the U.S. government has long classified Vietnam in a lower category of countries based on IP concerns. In fact, our testimony to USTR at this year's Special 301 hearing highlighted IP *improvements* in Vietnam (read FDRA's testimony [here](#)).

- The U.S. has long classified China, on the other hand, in a higher priority level of countries ... but no recent administration has given China the Priority Foreign Country label reserved for Vietnam.

### Footwear industry responds to the Vietnam designation

**FDRA President & CEO Matt Priest made the following statement today, on USTR's designation of Vietnam as a Priority Foreign Country:**

"Footwear and athletic brands rely on Vietnam as a critical, trusted part of the global supply chain that serves American consumers. Today's designation of Vietnam as a 'Priority Foreign Country' in the Special 301 report is a deeply concerning step—one that risks driving up costs for Americans and making counterfeiting and IP enforcement challenges worse rather than better.

"For years, U.S. policy has encouraged companies to diversify sourcing away from China, and many brands did exactly that—investing in Vietnam and other countries to build resilient supply chains. Targeting those same partners now creates a whack-a-mole policy environment that raises costs, disrupts planning, and risks pushing production decisions in the wrong direction.

"Strong intellectual property protection matters, and our industry supports practical, targeted solutions that actually improve enforcement. We urge USTR to use the consultation period to pursue constructive, workable approaches with Vietnam rather than higher taxes on American companies in the name of protecting intellectual property. Making goods more expensive for Americans is never the answer."

### 301 investigation into 60 economies over forced labor enforcement



FDRA filed written comments to USTR as it reviews whether 60 different economies are implementing and enforcing their own forced labor bans.

- **Tell me more:** More tariffs are the likely remedy here ... as USTR looks to rebuild the tariff regime struck down by the Supreme Court in February. We are using every opportunity possible — including the public comment process — to urge USTR to take a more tailored tariff approach when it comes to footwear.

👉 **What we are doing:** FDRA submitted two separate sets of comments in this key investigation — one on behalf of the footwear industry (read [here](#)) and another with several associations as part of the Forced Labor Working Group (read [here](#)).

🗨️ **What we said** in the FDRA comments:

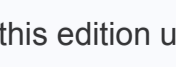
- **The U.S. footwear industry maintains a longstanding commitment to ensuring global supply chains remain free from forced labor.** We outlined the many ways we work to combat forced labor.
- **USTR should not to focus solely on a forced labor import ban** when examining the effectiveness of combating forced labor globally. The U.S. has had in place a forced labor ban for nearly one hundred years. Even as the world's largest and most influential market, the U.S. has not seen its import ban end forced labor globally. We highlighted the numerous ways countries can address this issue.
- **Imposing tariffs as a remedy could have the unintended consequence of reducing improvements in developing nations.** U.S. footwear brands sourcing in foreign countries export U.S. values and high standards to those countries. These investments can improve economic conditions for workers in developing nations and help lift individuals out of poverty. This is a critical tool for the U.S. in the fight against forced labor.
- **Imposing tariffs on footwear harms consumers without any benefit to the United States.** The U.S. government already places high tariffs on footwear, before any new tariffs are added. Increasing this tariff burden, through new added 301 tariffs, will result in higher costs for hardworking American families at a time when they already face tremendous economic uncertainty.

[Read FDRA's Comments](#)

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Matt and Thomas

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