

One of Sweden's most famous companies has apologized for selling products made in communist prisons. The furniture giant Ikea said it "deeply regrets" buying furniture that was made using forced labour in prisons in East Germany over twenty years ago. Ikea is famous for its modern, clean designs and reasonable prices. However, few people knew about the dark period in its history. The company now admits that political prisoners in communist East Germany were forced to make some of the furniture sold in Ikea stores across the world. This was before the fall of the Berlin Wall, when Germany was split in two. Ikea manager Jeanette Skjelmose told reporters: "We deeply regret that this could happen".

Ikea said it checks working conditions at its suppliers very carefully. They also checked suppliers 20 to 30 years ago, but their checks did not find the use of forced labour in prisons. Ms Skjelmose said: "The use of political prisoners for manufacturing was at no point accepted by Ikea. 30 years ago we didn't have the well-developed control system that we have today. We clearly did too little to stop those methods." Many of the prisoners now want compensation – they want Ikea to pay for their work. Human rights campaigner Rainer Wagner said many western companies used cheap, forced, prison labour in East Germany. He said: "Ikea is only the tip of the iceberg".

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