Wigdor LLP Files Discrimination Lawsuit Against the Organizers of the Davos Conference

July 8, 2024 • News & Press

On July 8th, 2024, Wigdor LLP has filed a lawsuit against the World Economic Forum LLC and World Economic Forum (the "Forum"), the organizers of the renowned annual "Davos" convention in Switzerland, and their founder Klaus Schwab, on behalf of Topaz Smith for pregnancy and race discrimination, among other claims.

Recent revelations show that the Forum has for years taken a scofflaw approach to antidiscrimination laws, permitting an atmosphere that is hostile to women and Black employees. It has also tried to sweep this unlawful conduct under the rug by retaliating against any employee who dares to speak up against the discriminatory environment.

As one report recently found, "[a]t least six female staffers were pushed out or otherwise saw their careers suffer when they were pregnant or returning from maternity leave. Another half dozen described sexual harassment they experienced at the hands of senior managers, some of whom remain at the Forum. Two said they were sexually harassed years ago by VIPs at Forum gatherings, including at Davos, where female staff were expected to be at the delegates' beck and call." And, "[i]n two more recent incidents, employees registered internal complaints after white Forum managers used the N-word around Black employees. Black employees also raised formal complaints to Forum leaders about being passed over for promotions or left out of Davos."

To make matters worse, the Forum promptly lashes out at anyone who protests the discriminatory environment. For instance, Schwab fired the Forum's Human Resources chief for refusing to get rid of a group of employees over 50 years old. He also stripped a senior female executive of all responsibilities after she proposed remedying the discriminatory environment by strengthening the Forum's code of conduct and encouraging female employees to complain about harassment.

Ms. Smith, a Black woman, is just the latest victim of the Forum's discriminatory work practices. Not only did the Forum refuse to provide Ms. Smith with the same high-profile opportunities at the Davos conference that were given to her white colleagues, she was also told by a white manager that she should consider her boss (also white), her "master." Ms. Smith's fate was sealed when she became pregnant and exercised her right to parental leave. The Forum terminated Ms. Smith's employment immediately upon her return from protected leave and replaced her with a non-pregnant, white employee.

The Complaint can be read here.

Quote from Wigdor Partner Valdi Licul:

"It is long past time that the Forum and Mr. Schwab are held to account for their horrendous pattern of

sexualizing and objectifying women, ruining the careers of pregnant women, and treating their Black employees as second-class citizens. The Forum and Mr. Schwab should be made to understand that such discrimination is flatly unlawful in the United States. Ms. Smith looks forward to her day in court."

Any questions can be directed to attorney Valdi Licul (vlicul@wigdorlaw.com) or Communications Manager Courtney Cormican (ccormican@wigdorlaw.com).