

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

Bangladesh Workplace Safety Accord Underway, but Government Failing on Workers' Rights

Brussels, 22 April 2014 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC is calling for Bangladesh and international clothing brands to stop holding back progress on workers' rights, as the first anniversary of the Rana Plaza building collapse approaches. 1,134 workers died when the building collapsed on 24 April, with many more injured. That tragedy, as well as the Tazreen factory fire the previous year, shocked the world and led to heavy pressure on international clothing brands and the Bangladesh government to act.

Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary, said "There has been some significant progress towards safer workplaces with the Bangladesh Accord; however, workers still face enormous obstacles and even violence and intimidation when they try to get respect for their basic rights. Many new unions in the garment sector have been registered, but the government is failing in its duty to ensure workers can bargain collectively for decent wages and conditions, and employers are simply refusing to bargain."

Factory inspections under the Bangladesh Accord on Building and Fire Safety, a binding agreement between over 160 mainly European and US apparel companies and Global Union Federations IndustriALL and UNI, are underway. Some minor improvements to the labour law have, however, fallen well short of international standards, and hundreds of thousands of workers in Export Processing Zones are still prohibited from forming unions.

When workers at Taratex BD Ltd sought to register their union on 4 February, management began a fierce anti-union campaign. Over 100 workers including 12 union executive members were sacked, and many were subjected to intimidation and physical assault. Union members have been forced to leave the homes out of fear for their safety, and two new leaders of the factory union were detained by management and forced to sign pre-prepared forms to resign from the union.

According to Sharan Burrow, "Workers continue to labour daily under highly exploitative terms and conditions of work. The Government of Bangladesh has much more to do to ensure that workers' rights are protected. Similarly, international brands have yet to assume their responsibility to ensure that workers' rights are respected in their supply chains. Without worker rights, any gains on building and fire safety will not be sustainable."

The ITUC represents 176 million workers in 161 countries and territories and has 325 national affiliates.

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