



BANGLADESH CENTER FOR WORKERS SOLIDARITY

Dear Scott,

I am writing on behalf of the Bangladesh Center Worker Solidarity (BCWS) concerning the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh and the Walmart/Gap Alliance. I want you to be aware of our perspective.

As you know, BCWS has been involved for many years in efforts to improve conditions in the Bangladesh garment industry and, in particular, to address the safety hazards that apparel workers face every day they go to work. We have been involved with the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh since its formation and we are happy to see how much support this important agreement has received from brands all over the world. We believe the Accord is the best way to keep garment workers safe and prevent us from losing more of our co-workers.

We have been very disappointed to see that some companies, including Gap and Walmart, have decided not to join the Accord but instead have formed their own program that is lacking many of the key aspects that are needed to make the Bangladesh garment industry safe. From the beginning, the Alliance has excluded Bangladeshi worker representatives and has not provided any meaningful role for these groups in the program's development or implementation. We cannot support a program that does not include a central role for the very people whom this program is supposed to protect and that lacks the key elements needed to solve the safety crisis in Bangladesh. This view is shared by our colleagues throughout the human rights and labor rights community in Bangladesh.

Although the Alliance does require factories to undergo safety inspections, these inspections are not independent and they will be meaningless unless the large brands are obligated to provide financial assistance so that factories can afford to make renovations and fix safety hazards – something the Alliance fails to require. The Alliance claims it has arranged a \$100 million loan program for factories but participation in this loan program is entirely voluntary and according to a recent Toronto Star article, in which several Walmart suppliers stated that they were never even offered these loans, it seems that this program may not even exist. Moreover, the Alliance lacks transparency, as we have seen from the recent inspection reports published by Walmart that fail to provide any real information about inspection results.

We are also very concerned about the Alliance's failure to protect workers' right to refuse dangerous work. We have seen from the recent disasters how critical respect for this right is to ensuring workers' safety. At Rana Plaza, workers were threatened with a loss of pay when they refused to enter the building and workers at Tazreen were told to stay at their machines when the fire alarm went off. If workers had been able to refuse to work under unsafe conditions without fear of retaliation, many lives could have been saved.

I have spoken with families of workers who were killed at Rana Plaza and Tazreen and interviewed survivors who are permanently disabled and I have seen the devastating impact of these disasters. We, along with many other Bangladesh labor rights organizations, support the Accord because it will help prevent more unnecessary deaths. The same cannot be said of the Alliance.

Sincerely,

Kalpona Akter, Executive Director