

**Clean Clothes Campaign  
International Secretariat**

PO box 11584, 1001 GN  
Amsterdam, Netherlands  
T: +31 20 4122785  
F: +31 20 4122786

**Maquila Solidarity  
Network**

606 Shaw Street,  
Toronto ON  
M6G 3L6, Canada  
T: +1 416 532 8584  
F: +1 416 532 7688

**International Labor  
Rights Forum**

2001 S St NW #420,  
Washington DC 20009,  
United States  
T: +1 202 347 4100  
F: +1 202 347 4885

April 1, 2010

To: Buyers sourcing in Bangladesh  
From: Clean Clothes Campaign, Maquila Solidarity Network, International Labor Rights Forum  
Re: Health and safety in Bangladesh factories

April 11 marks the fifth anniversary of the collapse of the Spectrum Sweater factory in Bangladesh, which killed 64 workers and injured at least 74 others. The Spectrum collapse, and several other large-scale disasters that followed it, focused global attention on the chronic safety problems in the Bangladesh garment industry.

Five years later, serious safety problems persist. We are writing to you today, as a buyer sourcing garments in Bangladesh, to ask that you take proactive, sustained, and coordinated measures to help eliminate these systemic problems.

The February 25th fire at the Garib & Garib Sweater Ltd factory in Bangladesh, which took the lives of 21 workers and injured another 50, is a brutal reminder of the need for effective and proactive action.

The Garib & Garib fire was started by an electrical short-circuit which generated thick black smoke and absorbed all of the oxygen in the air, suffocating workers who were trapped by blocked stairways and locked exits.

H&M, a major buyer from the Garib & Garib factory, insists that their last audit of the factory, which took place in October 2009, "did not show any serious safety shortcomings." According to the Dhaka Fire Service and Civil Defence, however, the factory's fire-fighting equipment was "virtually useless," and none of the security guards on duty reportedly knew how to operate fire extinguishers and hydrants.

Other buyers who previously sourced goods from Garib & Garib, including Mark's Work Warehouse and Wal-Mart, report that they left the factory after a similar fire last August which took the life of one firefighter.

**More could have been done by all concerned to prevent this disaster from occurring. More needs to be done to ensure further disasters are prevented.**

There are immediate steps that must be taken by the owners of Garib & Garib, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), the Bangladesh Government and international buyers to compensate Garib & Garib workers and their families and ensure that justice is served. We understand that some steps have already been taken and we are engaging with buyers to ensure that remediation continues.

There are additional steps, however, which should be taken by every major buyer active in Bangladesh to begin to address the chronic and deadly health and safety violations that plague the Bangladesh RMG industry.

Our organizations, in consultation with the Worker Rights Consortium and stakeholders in Bangladesh, and incorporating proposals developed earlier by the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation (ITGLWF), have compiled a list of actions that companies sourcing garments from Bangladesh should take within their own supply chain to prevent future tragedies. We are also asking that companies collectively press the Government of Bangladesh and the BGMEA to take specific actions to address these problems industry-wide in Bangladesh.

Specifically, we ask that:

**1) Apparel buyers should press the government of Bangladesh and the BGMEA to:**

- a) Undertake an urgent review of all multi-story buildings currently housing garment production facilities to ensure they may be safely used for this purpose. This review should be conducted by a committee consisting of representatives from all government departments directly involved in the observance of the relevant laws and regulations, labor groups, and international buyers.
- b) Ensure that the factory inspectorate is equipped with the necessary resources to conduct regular inspections for adherence to workplace safety and labor legislation, including Bangladesh's National Building Code and Factory Act.
- c) Such inspections must ensure that each factory:
  - i) Has a sufficient number of emergency exits and keeps such exits unlocked and unobstructed during working hours, so that workers can swiftly and safely evacuate in case of emergency and rescue and firefighting teams and equipment can quickly enter.
  - ii) Meets regulations for gas lines and electrical wiring, fire retardant materials in walls and roofs, the safe use in multistory buildings of the machinery being operated, and maintenance of working public address systems, emergency lighting, and other warning and response mechanisms.
  - iii) Has a professionally-developed fire emergency policy, which is tested through regular, monthly fire drills with all workers.
  - iv) Has a designated manager responsible for structural and fire safety, and an adequate number of employees who are trained to respond appropriately to fires and other emergency situations.

- v) Has well-maintained fire prevention materials and fire fighting equipment on the premises.
  - vi) Has a factory health and safety committee comprised of representatives of management and workers, which meets regularly to review and address health and safety issues, including fire safety.
  - vii) In the case of factories operating in buildings housing more than one enterprise, in addition to the measures outlined above, has a coordinated fire emergency policy and procedures, accessible fire fighting equipment, designated and trained personnel, and a program of regular fire drills for the entire building.
- d) Issue – on a quarterly basis – a public list of all factories that do not meet the standards outlined above and revoke the export license and BGMEA membership of each factory on this list until compliance is demonstrated.
  - e) Set up a high-level investigative committee to conduct inquiries into accidents at factories involving worker fatalities or multiple serious injuries. Such a committee should conduct a thorough investigation into the causes of each such incident and issue a public report of its investigation. The government should pursue all applicable criminal charges against the employer in the case of negligence.
  - f) Provide emergency short-term compensation and adequate disability or survivors' benefits to the families of workers who are killed or permanently disabled because of workplace accidents. Provide free medical treatment to workers injured in such incidents. The amount of compensation should be determined through negotiations with worker rights organizations, including the unions representing the workers.
  - g) In the case that factories are closed due to accidents or a failure to meet safety standards, ensure workers are provided income support, equivalent to their former average earnings, for the duration of the closure or, in cases where factories are closed permanently or for an extended time, a reasonable period in which to secure alternative employment.
  - h) Ensure respect for workers' internationally recognized rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining. Trade unions can and should play a central role in promoting workplace health and safety by ensuring workers a voice in identifying and addressing hazards, and providing collective representation to workers who are injured in workplace accidents. Government (in particular the Joint Director of Labor) and factory management should ensure the removal of all unlawful or unreasonable obstacles to the registration of factory-level unions.

**2) Buyers should do the following with respect to each of their own supplier factories:**

- a) Conduct regular audits of factories to ensure the facilities are compliant with applicable structural and fire safety standards, including in each area discussed in item 1.C above.
- b) Develop a system that includes meaningful engagement with labor groups at each stage of the audit process, including pre-audit planning, arrangements for

labor groups to accompany brand representatives to observe inspections at certain facilities, and review of audit findings.

- c) Notify the Bangladesh government and BGMEA when factory audits identify health and safety hazards, and publicly disclose the results of such audits.
- d) Ensure that workers have information about and access to credible grievance mechanisms in order to report information about health and safety hazards.
- e) Ensure respect for workers' internationally recognized rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining. As discussed above, trade unions can and should play a central role in promoting workplace health and safety.

There has already been at least one more tragic death, at the Matrix Sweater factory, since the Garib & Garib fire. On March 21, a fluorescent light exploded at the Matrix factory, causing a cloud of smoke. When the fire alarm went off, workers panicked and fled the building crushing one woman and injuring 25 in the ensuing chaos. Early reports from police say that there were no emergency exits and that stairways were blocked with cartons.

We cannot wait for more disasters to happen. Urgent and sustained action is needed. We hope to hear back from you by April 14<sup>th</sup>. On April 22<sup>th</sup> we will be making a public announcement about the need for further action.

Sincerely,



On behalf of the Clean  
Clothes Campaign,  
Tessel Pauli  
CCC International  
Secretariat



Lynda Vanz  
Executive Director  
Maquila Solidarity  
Network



Bama Athreya  
Executive Director  
International Labor  
Rights Forum

cc: Amirul Haque Amin, President, National Garment Workers Federation, Bangladesh  
Patrick Itschert, General Secretary, International Textile, Garment and Leatherworkers Federation  
Scott Nova, Executive Director, Worker Rights Consortium  
Auret Van Heerden, President, Fair Labor Association  
Dan Rees, Director, Ethical Trading Initiative  
Erica van Doorn, Director, Fair Wear Foundation  
Alice Tepper Marlin, President, Social Accountability International  
Sasha Radovich, Senior Manager, MFA Forum