



September 14, 2010

Mr. Lawrence Cannon
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade
Government of Canada
125 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, ON, Canada K1A 0G2

Dear Minister Cannon;

We are writing to request that the Canadian government take steps to protect worker rights advocates who have faced repression and detention in Bangladesh.

As the New York Times reported on August 16, the government of Bangladesh arrested the leaders of a globally respected labour rights organization: the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS). BCWS Executive Director Kalpona Akter and Babul Akhter were held in detention for almost a month before being granted bail last week.

The arrests occurred in the wake of widespread unrest among Bangladeshi garment workers, who were demanding an increase to the country's minimum wage. Bangladesh has the lowest wages of any major apparel producing country. Unrest peaked on July 30 of this year when an announced wage increase for garment workers was significantly less than many anticipated. Unfortunately, instead of dealing effectively with the poor working conditions that underlie the recent turmoil, the Bangladesh government has responded by scapegoating peaceful, respected labour rights advocates, falsely accusing them of inciting riots. Prior to the leaders' arrests, another BCWS staff person was detained and tortured in an effort to force him to give false evidence against himself and other BCWS leaders.

It seems that the source of most of the evidence against the BCWS staff comes from the testimonies of 6 other arrested workers, which was obtained only after charges against the BCWS had already been filed.

This June, the Government of Bangladesh also cancelled the BCWS' NGO registration and froze their bank accounts, alleging the organization was inciting unrest in garment factories. The BCWS was accused of "involvement in several wrongful acts, including inciting to create [a] riotous situation and assisting in creating labor unrest in the

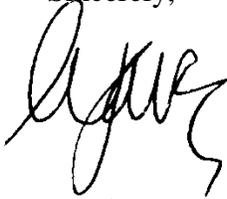
readymade-garments sector, and in anti-state and social activities,” which were “deemed as [a] threat to national interests and security.”

The crackdown on BCWS and its leaders has been condemned by leading human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch, which has described the government’s actions as “part of a campaign against labor right activists, union leaders, and workers who have been pressing for the right to organize unions and demanding increases in the minimum wage.”

We ask that the Canadian High Commission in Bangladesh lodge an official protest concerning the arrest of labour rights advocates Kalpona Akter and Babul Akhter, and, on behalf of the Government of Canada, ask that the Government of Bangladesh:

- review the charges against Kalpona Akter and Babul Akhter and dismiss any charges that rely on insufficient evidence or coerced testimony;
- restore the organization’s official NGO registration and return its assets; and
- refrain from any further intimidation, repression and harassment of peaceful labour and human rights advocates.

Sincerely,



Lynda Yanz
Executive Director
Maquila Solidarity Network

cc: Mr. Mortoza Tarafder, Trade Commissioner, Canadian High Commission