September 15, 2014

The Honourable Ed Fast
Minister of International Trade
Government of Canada

The Honourable Christian Paradis
Minister of International Development and La Francophonie
Government of Canada

Dear Ministers Fast and Paradis:

On behalf of the undersigned Canadian human rights, religious, international development, women’s, trade union, investor, teacher, student and community organizations, we are writing to urge the Canadian government to publicly encourage Canadian companies sourcing apparel products from Bangladesh to make generous contributions to the Rana Plaza Donors’ Trust Fund, irrespective of whether they had a relationship to a factory in the Rana Plaza building. We also request that the Canadian government offer to match the total contributions to the Fund made by Canadian companies, organizations and institutions.

More than 16 months after the collapse of the Rana Plaza building, in which over 1,100 Bangladeshi garment workers were killed and approximately 2,500 injured, the families of those killed and the workers who suffered debilitating injuries have not yet received the full compensation to which they are entitled and are in desperate need of support.

The governments of seven European countries – the UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain and Denmark – released a joint public statement in June of this year calling on retailers and brands in their respective countries to donate generously to the Trust Fund immediately. That statement also calls on the Government of Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers’ Association (BGMEA) “to increase their contributions and ensure their public accountability.”

To their credit, many of the US and European retailers and brands, as well as company foundations, that have made contributions to the Trust Fund to date had no business relationship with garment factories in the Rana Plaza building. As companies sourcing apparel products from Bangladesh, they recognized their shared responsibility for working conditions and safety practices in the Bangladeshi garment industry and the urgent need of the victims and survivors of the Rana Plaza tragedy.

Despite the fact that Bangladesh is a major sourcing destination for most Canadian retailers, only one Canadian retailer – Loblaw (Joe Fresh) – has made a contribution to the Trust Fund to date.

The Rana Plaza Donors’ Trust Fund, for which the International Labour Organization (ILO) acts as the sole trustee, was established to provide compensation to the victims and survivors of the tragedy for lost income and medical expenses. As of September 1, the Trust Fund has received less than half the $40 million needed to fully compensate the victims and survivors.

In September and early October, the ILO will distribute the first installment of compensation to the victims and survivors of the Rana Plaza tragedy. It is therefore imperative that there are sufficient
monies in the Trust Fund to provide the first installment of compensation to all eligible claimants, and to ensure that there are sufficient additional contributions made in the very near future so that all the eligible claimants can receive the full compensation to which they are entitled.

We appeal to your government to add its voice to those of its European counterparts by publicly encouraging Canadian companies that have apparel products made in Bangladesh to also contribute generously to the Trust Fund immediately, by offering to match those total contributions, and by calling on the Government of Bangladesh and the BGMEA to increase their contributions and ensure their public accountability.

We strongly urge you to act promptly on this critically important request. We look forward to receiving your positive response to our letter.

Yours truly,

Alliance du personnel professionnel et technique de la santé et des services sociaux: Carolle Dubé, présidente
Amnesty International Canada, Alex Neve, Secretary General
Amnistie internationale Canada francophone, Béatrice Vaugrante, directrice générale
BC Federation of Labour: Jim Sinclair, President
BC Government and Service Employees’ Union (BCGEU): Stephanie Smith, President
Canadian Federation of Students: Jessica McCormick, National Chairperson
Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace: Julie Laplame, Research and Advocacy Director
Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace: Toronto Archdiocesan Council
Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC): Julia Sanchez, CEO-President
Canadian Labour Congress (CLC): Hassan Yussuff, President
Canadian Union of Postal Workers: Denis Lemelin, National President
Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE): Paul Moist, National President
Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ): Louise Chabot, présidente
Centre International De Solidarité Ouvrière (CISO): Michèle Asselin, coordonnatrice
Comité d'action contre la traite humaine interne et internationale: Louise Dionne, coordonnatrice
Comité de solidarité/Trois-Rivières: Jean-Marc Lord, directeur général
Confédération des syndicats nationaux, Jacques Létourneau, président
Conseil central du Montreal métropolitain (CCMM-CSN): Dominique Gaigneault, présidente
Council of Canadians: Maude Barlow, National Chairperson
CUPE 1979: Guy Laflamme and Jamie Kass, Co-Presidents
Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO): Sam Hammond, President
Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ): Daniel Boyer, président
Fédération des femmes du Québec: Alexa Conradi, présidente
Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec: Regine Laurent, présidente
Handicap International Canada: Jérôme Bobin, Executive Director
Inter Pares: David Bruer, Program Manager Asia
Jesuits in English Canada: Peter Bisson sj, Provincial Superior
KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives: Jennifer Henry, Executive Director
Ligue des droits et libertés: Dominique Peschard, président
Maquila Solidarity Network: Lynda Yanz, Executive Director
Newfoundland & Labrador Federation of Labour: Mary Shortall, President
Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association (OECTA): James Ryan, President
Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU): Warren (Smokey) Thomas, President,
Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation: Paul Elliot, President
Oxfam Canada: Robert Fox, Executive Director
Presbyterian World Service & Development: Ken Kim, Executive Director
Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC): Robyn Benson, National President
Service Employees Union (SEU), Local 800: Raymond Larcher, President
Shareholder Association for Research and Education (SHARE):
Peter Chapman, Executive Director
South Asian Women’s Rights Organization (SAWRO): Sultana Jahangir, Executive Director
Syndicat de la fonction publique et parapublique du Québec: Lucie Martineau, présidente

Syndicat des Travailleurs et Travailleuses des Postes (STTP): Christian Martel, Directeur national, STTP Région du Québec
The Primate’s World Relief and Development Fund: Adele Finney, Executive Director
The United Church in Canada: Michael Blair, Executive Minister, Church in Mission Unit
Toronto and York Region Labour Council: John Cartwright, President
Unifor: Jerry Dias, National President
Unifor Québec: Joseph Gargiso, directeur adjoint
Unifor section locale 8284: Richard l’heureux, président
United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) – Canada: Paul R. Meinema, President
United Steelworkers: Ken Neumann, Canadian National Director
UNL Canada Inc.: Fuad Chowdhury, Director
Vancouver and District Labour Council: Joey Hartman, President
Workers’ Action Center: Deena Ladd, Coordinator
Workers United Canada: Barry Fowlie, Director
Workers United Quebec: Claude St. Marseille, Director

cc. Heather Cruden, High Commissioner of Canada to Bangladesh
Diane J. Brisebois, President and Chief Executive Officer, Retail Council of Canada
Bob Kirke, Executive Director, Canadian Apparel Federation