

News

from Bangladesh

Workers call on large retailers: Compensate victims !

Bangladeshi garment workers, supported by the National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF), are still fighting for adequate compensation for the victims of the Tazreen Fashion and Rana Plaza factory disasters. In these two incidents alone, over 1.200 workers were killed, and over 2.500 injured.

The Tazreen fire already happened in November 2012, but multinational buyers are still unwilling to pay adequate compensation as demanded by NGWF and other unions. But workers and unions do not intend to cease reminding the buyer companies of the part they played in bringing about the tragedies. They keep asking them to start acting responsibly now, at least, by paying compensations – where they should have acted before to prevent deadly disaster from happening in the first place.

On June 26, the union renewed its demands to buyers and government with a human chain which was rapidly dispersed by police, though, and a protest march through the streets of Dhaka.

The Tazreen and Rana Plaza workers' families are facing desperate situations: in most cases, the seamstresses provided the major part of the family income with their factory wages, some even the complete income. Families of killed or mutilated workers lost their basis of survival. Many injured workers will never be able to work again; many need expensive physical and/or trauma treatment. These families' total impoverishment can only be averted by paying 1. compensations in the line of the lifelong "loss of earning" and 2. all necessary treatments.

The fact that a large number of large multinational retailers signed the Fire and Building Safety Agreement (Accord) has broadly met with great consent, if not euphoria. It is being seen as a mile



An international network for the right to organise along the global supply chain from textile and garment to retail

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stone in the development of safe workplaces for the Bangladeshi garment industry – which is true, on the one hand, because the Accord is unprecedented and unique in regard to a systematic involvement of local workers and unions, and includes a binding arbitration. German works council workers in the ExChains network took a stand for it successfully. On the other hand, the Accord does not provide solutions to workers' major problems in the globalised garment industry: wages too shamefully low to live on; a horrendous number of forced overtime hours; sexual harassment on a daily basis; relentless management obstruction to workers trying to organise in independent unions.

US giant retailers Gap and Walmart sourced from Tazreen. Both of them neither paid compensations nor signed the Accord. Instead, they started their own "initiative" – which is of course not legally enforceable and does not include workers' organisations. The factory owner has not been taken to court. And the relief payments promised by government are nowhere to be seen.

Time is running out for the families. They have no time left to wait for the day when government and buyers will start acting at last. The NGWF managed to organise solidarity payments – a financial relief for a number of concerned families in order to secure their survival for some more weeks at least.



On June 29, the NGWF, jointly with a fellow union, called for a protest day to „Put an End to Deathtraps“, also attended by 57 orphans whose parents died at work in the disaster factories. Their parents died because companies like Walmart and Gap do not want to commit

to binding agreements, such as the Accord. They were killed because government, factory owners, and buyers thoroughly ignored the issue of workers' safety during the past decade and did nothing to protect the workers who work in their factories and produce their profit and three quarters of the country's foreign income.

The NGWF does not only demand an end to killings in the workplace. It is calling on the multinational companies to enforce higher wages in their supplier factories and to pay higher unit prices to enable them. With a reduced pressure on prices, workers could more easily succeed in struggling for higher wages. This is why the wage demand is an essential part of the ExChains campaign.

Addressing Bangladeshi government, the NGWF demands a labour legislation which serves to improve workers' safety and strengthens workers' chances to organise in independent unions.

Only by organising and fighting united, workers stand a chance to secure better working and living conditions for themselves.