



*Solidarity along the supply chain:  
from production to retail,  
workers unite!*

## Joint Campaign for Workers' Rights

ExChains is a workers' network aiming to unite workers along the supply chain from Asian textile and garment production to European retail. Its major goals are to create international solidarity between workers and to bring about a sustainable change of the global garment industrial structures. This is a long term process, and it requires the establishment of union agency and power in production and retail. ExChains wants to help irritate the Northern perspective on women and men in the global South as mere victims of their social conditions. Working closely with unions and workers in the global South, the campaign takes them seriously as actors. Actions are being jointly planned and coordinated. Currently, the campaign centers around four major demands, jointly developed with the partners from the global South, and designed to help enable union organising.

### 1. Stop Worker Killings by Accident in Bangladesh:

#### Sign the Agreement on Fire Safety

Large numbers of workers are getting killed and injured in fire related accidents each and every year. If we want these accidents to stop, we must allow the safety conditions in the factories to be thoroughly changed. The time is NOW: In spring 2012, US retail giant PVH (Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein etc.) was the first major buyer to sign a groundbreaking agreement on fire safety, including local unions, and international NGOs. All signatories to this agreement become part of a joint two-year programme for the promotion of occupational safety. Key elements of the programme are workers' trainings, the establishment of factory-level health and safety committees, and the development of an independent monitoring system with active worker and trade union participation. PVH stated the programme will start once three other major retail companies have signed the agreement. Recently, Tchibo was the first to do so.

### 2. A Higher Wage for a Life in Dignity

The average wages for workers in the garment sector in Asia are outrageous! No one can raise children or care for their elders on these wages, or even live decently by themselves. In order to make ends meet, workers have to do countless hours of "volun-

tary" overtime – or make their children take up work. Thus, the large garment retail companies make profits on the general conditions of over-exploitation and are indirectly responsible for child labour, even if their direct suppliers do not employ children. The same is true for other producing countries.

Therefore, we are concretely urging companies sourcing from Asian countries to pay higher unit-prices in order to enable higher wages for their suppliers' workers. In the long run, we want the workers to be paid a living wage – a wage that allows them to cover their own and their dependents' basic needs and to reach a certain level of social security. Workers must be able to earn this wage by working normal hours (as according to law), and the wage must be regularly adapted to eventual price hikes in basic goods. We do not aim at replacing local struggles by this demand, but at supporting local wage demands of unions and workers' groups. We are currently working with the trade unions in the global South (Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India) to create a mechanism to guarantee that higher unit prices, once paid by the sourcing companies, will be passed on to the factory workers without deductions.

### 3. Trade Union Access Rights

Not unless allowed to organise in independent, democratic trade unions of their own choice, workers will be able to change their situation and fight for their rights and entitlements, and for a life in dignity. Therefore, we are urging the large retailers to include in their Codes of Conduct and implement with their suppliers the trade unions' right to access workers in the workplace, where unions can regularly inform workers on their rights and point out to them possibilities for organising in unions of their own choice.

### 4. Supplier Transparency

The multinational retail companies dominating the major garment consumer markets must share their lists of suppliers. This is essential for local unions and workers who want to have an impact by monitoring and publicly disclosing working conditions at supplier factories.

The same is true for all four demands: they are embedded in activities of the partner unions in the global South. Local union organising is the key to decent working conditions. Workers themselves must be in a position to monitor the implementation of agreements and to fight for improved working conditions. This will bring about a change of unfair labour relations. Local workers are already fighting for union organising, higher wages, improved fire safety provisions, and good working conditions. The activities of German unionised

workers and activists are aimed at supporting their fight.

#### Participating organisations:

- ✓ National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF), Bangladesh; ngwf@dhaka.net
- ✓ Free Trade Zones and General Service Employees Union (FTZ&GSEU), Sri Lanka; info@ftzunionlanka.org
- ✓ Garment and Allied Workers Union (GAWU), India, NTUI affiliate; gawu-gurgaon@gmail.com

- ✓ Garment and Fashion Workers Union (GAFWU), New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI) affiliate, India; gafwu.chennai@gmail.com
- ✓ Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft (ver.di), Germany; www.exchains.verdi.de
- ✓ DGB Bildungswerk Bund; www.nord-sued-netz.de
- ✓ Transnationals Information Exchange (TIE Global); info@tie-germany.org, Facebook: TIE Global