



WORKER RIGHTS CONSORTIUM

November 28, 2012

Hilda Solis
Secretary of Labor
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Secretary Solis,

This Saturday, 112 workers were killed when a fire broke out at the Bangladesh garment factory, Tazreen Fashions. Much like the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire more than a century ago, the largely female workforce found the exit doors blocked and staircases filled with smoke when they tried to escape and many workers were killed as they jumped from the upper floors of the building. The factory was a supplier to several major US brands and retailers including Walmart, Sears/Kmart, Dickies, Sean Combs (ENYCE) and MJ Soffee.

This disaster is only the latest in a series of deadly factory fires that have taken the lives of hundreds of garment workers in Bangladesh and Pakistan. Unfortunately, the brand-controlled monitoring systems have failed to protect workers' lives and these unnecessary deaths will continue unless and until brands agree to meaningful reforms in their supply chains in South Asia. We are writing to ask that you urge major US brands and retailers to sign on to the Bangladesh Fire and Building Safety Agreement, which embodies such reforms and that has already been embraced by one of the leading apparel companies in the US, PVH – which owns Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger. A copy of the agreement is attached.

The Agreement involves a number of critical elements that distinguish it from the voluntary corporate social responsibility programs that have failed to protect workers:

- Inspections by trained fire safety experts operating independently of the brands and the factories being inspected;
- Public reporting of the results of all inspections;
- Mandatory repairs and renovations to address all identified hazards – and a requirement that brands must cease doing business with any supplier that refuses to make needed repairs and operate safely;
- A central role for workers and unions, including worker-led safety committees in all factories and access to factories for unions to educate workers on how they can protect their rights and their safety, including their right to refuse unsafe work;

- Contracts with suppliers that ensure sufficient financing and adequate pricing to cover the cost of eliminating deadly hazards and operating in a safe manner; and
- A binding contract between the brands and worker representatives that make these commitments enforceable – so the brands have to follow through, even if it means increased costs or longer turnaround times on orders.

This Agreement has been initiated by Bangladeshi and international labor unions and NGOs, including our organizations. We understand that the Department of Labor has been consulting with several brands and retailers about steps they can take to address fire safety at their overseas manufacturers and we hope that you will demonstrate your support for workers in Bangladesh by urging these brands and retailers to join the program. This Agreement is the best mechanism available to prevent more needless deaths of workers who sew clothes for US corporations. We also expect the US government to use all available means to urge the Bangladesh government to respect workers' associational rights and ensure that trade union and health and safety laws are amended to meet international standards and are effectively implemented.

Sincerely,

Scott Nova
Executive Director
Worker Rights Consortium

Judy Gearhart
Executive Director
International Labor Rights Forum