



BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER

October 2, 2014

The Honorable Ellen Tauscher
Independent Chair
Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety
1220 L St. NW, Suite 100 – 303
Washington, DC 20005

Madame Chair:

Thank you for participating in the workshop on worker safety in the ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh that was hosted by the Bipartisan Policy Center on September 17th. We were pleased to help facilitate the agreement that formed the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety last year. The workshop on September 17 provided an opportunity to evaluate the achievements of the Alliance during its first year and to identify the major challenges that lie ahead in its work to improve structural, electrical and fire safety conditions in Bangladeshi garment factories from which Alliance members source.

The statements provided by several stakeholders and the report on DLA Piper's examination of the Alliance's work to date by John Clarke, demonstrate how the work of the 26 member companies of the Alliance are improving worker safety and worker rights in Bangladesh's ready-made garment sector.

As we both acknowledged during the workshop, the Alliance has built an impressive record of accomplishments in its first year of operation. To encourage consistent factory inspections, it developed a robust Fire Safety and Structural Integrity Standard in conjunction with the Bangladesh government's National Tripartite Plan of Action and the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh (Accord). Every one of the 587 factories supplying Alliance members has been inspected. Alliance member companies have made several types of affordable financing available to implement remediation plans. Additionally, 1.1 million workers have been trained on basic fire safety. And, consistent with the Alliance's pledge to provide 50% of lost wages for up to 4 months to workers displaced by factory remediation and closures, more than 1,000 workers have received such compensation. Factory workers should not be financially disadvantaged because their factory is undergoing remediation. The Alliance not only recognizes this fact it has acted to protect workers.

Appreciation for the Alliance's efforts was evident in the stakeholders' remarks during the workshop. However, as the speakers acknowledged, several challenges lie ahead for the

Alliance, the government of Bangladesh and others who are working to address these important issues. We offer the following suggestions as you consider the Alliance's priorities:

I. Coordination and Cooperation among Worker Safety Initiatives

One of the Alliance's most significant early achievements was its development of a single standard for factory inspections. The ability of the Alliance, the Accord and the Tripartite National Action Plan to agree upon a standard that is being used by all inspection programs in Bangladesh is a template for collaboration that the Alliance should strive to follow as it continues this important work.

During the workshop, U.S. officials recommended that the Alliance take part in meetings scheduled for October 20th in Brussels on the U.S. government's Action Plan and the EU Sustainability Compact. The officials from Office of the United States Trade Representative, the Department of State, and the Department of Labor stressed the need for cooperation among the Alliance, the Bangladesh government, the Accord, and the ILO's Better Work Programme with regard to worker empowerment. We agree with their observation and agree that the Alliance should be represented at the event in Brussels to further that crucial objective.

II. Continuation of Worker Surveys to Determine Training Impact

Participants in the workshop acknowledged that high worker turnover and low literacy rates pose significant challenges to the Alliance in its efforts to train Bangladesh factory workers and effectively measure the results of this training. The Alliance is using a "train-the-trainer" method to instill a safety awareness culture, and worker survey results suggest that the method has been effective thus far. The percentage of workers who can correctly identify the right steps to take in the event of a fire has increased from 39% to 98%, and the percentage of workers correctly identifying the five most common fire hazards has increased from 2% to 51%. As the Alliance continues to move forward with worker training and other initiatives, we recommend the continued use of worker surveys to measure the success of the programs.

III. Full Implementation of Helpline

A key component to worker empowerment is the establishment of a worker helpline. We heard from Ms. Suraiya Haque about the pilot phase of the Alliance's helpline, *Amader Kotha*, which is currently active in 50 factories. We were pleased with the Alliance's commitment to establish a communication channel through which workers can express

their safety and other job-related concerns without fear of intimidation or job loss, and we agree with Ms. Haque that a focus for the Alliance should be expanding the helpline to all of its members' factories.

IV. Bangladesh Government Involvement

We were pleased to hear from U.S. government officials that work with the government of Bangladesh continues, and we clearly expressed that additional commitment and capacity by the Bangladesh government is necessary for the Alliance's efforts and for those of other initiatives to be successful and sustainable. Simply put, the government of Bangladesh must build its capacity to perform what are essentially governmental functions, now being undertaken by the Alliance.

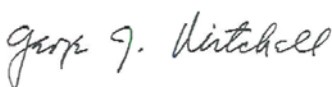
V. Remediation

Finally, we want to commend the Alliance for its efforts to address the need for financial assistance for the costs of factory remediation. It is clear the Alliance continues to identify means for factory owners to access capital in a way that incentivizes the industry to invest in fire and safety improvements. We encourage the Alliance to continue its efforts in that regard and we are eager to be kept informed on the Alliance's progress as factory remediation rises to the forefront of the Alliance's work.

Ensuring worker safety in Bangladesh will require determination and collaboration both within Bangladesh and internationally. We are still closer to the beginning of the Alliance's five-year Members Agreement than its end. We look forward to continuing to monitor, and be informed of, the Alliance's progress.

Thank you again for your dedication and willingness to address this critical issue for the future of Bangladesh.

Most sincerely,



George J. Mitchell
Co-founder



Olympia J. Snowe
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