## Nassa Group's Case March 8, 2011

On June 19, 2010, an uprising of tens of thousands of workers in the Aasulia industrial area began with 7,000 workers at a Nassa factory demonstrating for a 5,000 taka minimum wage. According to newspaper accounts, three hours of sporadic street battles ensued in which workers erected blockades and burned tires and scraps of wood while police "fired rubber bullets, lobbed tear gas shells and used water cannons to disperse unruly workers."

The following day, police filed charges against 3,000 to 4,000 unnamed workers. Nassa management brought separate charges (case number 48 filed at the Aasulia Police Station by the Assistant General Manager of the Nassa Basic Complex) against Babul Akhter and Aminul Islam and dozens of workers, claiming they entered a Nassa factory, assaulted officers, vandalized property worth 900,000 taka, and stole motherboards of ten computerized bartek machines. At the time Mr. Islam was recuperating from being tortured just four days earlier at the hands of National Security Intelligence officers who had demanded he confess that BCWS leaders had instigated worker unrest and violence. He was in too much pain to move and too terrified of being detained by police or security forces to even come close to a protest. For their part, Mr. Akhter and Ms. Akter were in a meeting with Mr. Israfil Alam, a member of parliament and the chairman of the Standing Committee on Labor and Employment, at the time of the alleged misconduct at Nassa.

Nassa has claimed publicly, and to brands and retailers, that they have dropped the charges against BCWS staff and leaders relating to the June 19, 2010, uprising. BGMEA also states in its September 8, 2010, letter to the United States Congress that they have been informed that the Nassa Group does not have any charges against BCWS anymore. Yet, Babul Akhter and Aminul Islam are still required to report to court under this case. The next court hearing is scheduled for February 2, 2010.

Like the Envoy workers, Nassa workers contacted BCWS for technical assistance in organizing a union to improve conditions. BCWS held a series of training workshops with Nassa workers from April to June, 2010. But Nassa management told workers to desist and refrain from any interaction with BCWS. Manirul Islam, a worker at Nassa Global Wear who had attended a BCWS training and a gathering organized by the Bangladesh Garment and Industrial Workers Federation, filed a complaint with the International Labor Organization. He testified that on May 8, 2010, managers took away his attendance card when he arrived at the factory where he had worked for three years as a sewing machine operator. At the end of the day's shift a company official announced over the public address system:

"First, those who attended the training with the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity are enemies of the nation and will be fired. Second, these workers will not be allowed to live in the area. They will be forced out. Finally, the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity and the labor federation will be taught a lesson."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>i</sup> "76 factories closed, 100 injured in police-workers clash in Ashulia," *The Financial Express*, June 20, 2010, www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com.

<sup>&</sup>quot;" "Case filed against 4,000 workers," *The Financial Express*, June 21, 2010, www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com.

"" Manirul Islam's testimony is on file with the International Labor Rights Forum.