

Envoy Group's Case March 8, 2011

In a letter to the United States Congress on September 8, 2010, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association claimed that, “Envoy Group has neither lodged any cases against the suspected miscreant, nor is the party to the legal procedure behind the arrest. Therefore, it can be made lucid that the Envoy Group has been falsely blamed of being involved in the arrest of the mentioned leaders [of BCWS].”ⁱ

However, on August 22, 2010, a security officer at Manta Apparels Ltd., a part of the Envoy Group, filed a complaint against Aminul Islam (case number 51 in the Aasulia Police Station), accusing him of participating in attacks against the factory and vandalizing property on July 31, 2010. At the time of this incident, Mr. Islam was in the Tangail district office of the Bangladesh Garment and Industrial Workers Federation office, 95 kilometers away from Manta Apparels. Mr. Islam is scheduled for a court hearing on this case February 2, 2010.

Bangladeshi media describe Envoy as “one of the most violence stricken factories.”ⁱⁱ Envoy workers organized at least half a dozen documented mass protests from August 2009 through August 2010. Early in 2010, Envoy workers turned to BCWS for support. BCWS conducted ten *Uthan Baithak* (courtyard meetings), reaching more than 350 workers at Manta Apparels. The training focused on wage payments, working hours, work leave, benefits, the right to organize, the right to bargain collectively, and other labor rights under the Bangladesh Labor Act of 2006, International Labor Organization conventions, and corporate codes of conduct. BCWS also led a two-day leadership training session for 20 Envoy workers to teach them how to negotiate with management for their legal rights.

In addition, BCWS conducted an extensive investigation into working conditions at Manta Apparels based on in-depth interviews with workers. Among other findings, BCWS reports that managers tell workers how to behave and what to tell the buyers' auditors in order to pass inspection. When some workers requested a worker participation committee, managers threatened that they would force those workers to resign and not pay them their legally mandated severance pay. If they complained or raised their voices for their rights, managers warned them, the company would file criminal charges against them.

ⁱ The Envoy Group is a US\$100 million apparel conglomerate, one of the pioneers in the export-oriented ready-made-garment industry, operating 14 apparel assembly factories and numerous related and unrelated businesses, including information technology, computers, fisheries, real estate, banking, and healthcare. The company's owner and managing director, Abdus Salam Murshedy, is also the president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

ⁱⁱ “RMG units in Ashulia, N'ganj resume production amid tight security,” *Financial Express*, August 2, 2010, www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com.