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Author: ILRF, CCC, MSN, WRC, and AFL-CIO

For US-based inquiries, contact:

- Jeff Vogt, AFL-CIO, jvogt@aflcio.org ^[1], 202 637 3904
- Trina Tocco, ILRF, trina.tocco@ilrf.org ^[2], 269 873 1000
- Scott Nova, WRC, nova@workersrights.org ^[3], 202 387 4884, 202 360 7957

For European-based inquiries, contact:

Ineke Zeldenrust, CCC, ineke@cleanclothes.org ^[4], +31 651280210

For Canadian-based inquiries, contact:

Kevin Thomas, MSN, kthomas@maquilasolidarity.org ^[5], 416 532 8584

Labor and Human Rights Organizations Call on Government of Bangladesh to Release Worker Rights Advocates, Express Fear They Will be Tortured

Leaders of Prominent Labor Rights Group Were Seized by Police on August 13

Labor and human rights organizations in the U.S., Europe, and Canada are decrying the arrest late Thursday night of leaders of the non-profit organization Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS) and calling for their immediate release.

Ms. Kalpona Akter and Mr. Babul Ahkter were arrested at 2:00 am in Dhaka by twenty armed police.

The AFL-CIO, Worker Rights Consortium, International Labor Rights Forum, United Students Against Sweatshops (all based in the US), Maquila Solidarity Network (Canada) and Clean Clothes Campaign (Europe) called on the government of Bangladesh to immediately release the labor rights advocates and drop the unsubstantiated charges against them. The groups also expressed grave concern for their physical safety in light of the government's track record of torturing detainees.

BCWS is one of the most prominent human rights organizations working to improve conditions in Bangladesh's garment export sector, the country's leading industry. It conducts worker rights training and legal and public advocacy to improve labor standards. Kalpona Akter, the organization's executive director, is a former child laborer. Babul Ahkter is the organization's second in command.

The BCWS leaders were arrested on unsubstantiated charges of fomenting worker unrest – part of a strategy by the government of Bangladesh to deal with recent riots among garment workers by scapegoating peaceful worker advocates rather than addressing the true underlying cause of such turmoil: the country's abysmal working conditions. At 20 cents per hour, Bangladesh has by far the lowest wages of any major apparel producing country. Its garment sector has also been ravaged by a series of fires and building collapses which have killed scores of workers.

The arrest of BCWS' leaders is the latest in an escalating government campaign against the organization. On June 3, the NGO Affairs Bureau canceled BCWS' NGO registration and ordered that its property be confiscated and its bank accounts frozen. Less than two weeks later, a member of the organization's staff, Aminul Islam, was detained by security forces and severely beaten before managing to escape.

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The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) is a voluntary federation of 56 national and international labor unions. The AFL-CIO union movement represents 11.5 million members, including 3 million members in Working America, its community affiliate. For more information, please visit <http://www.aflcio.org> [6].

International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF) is an advocacy organization dedicated to achieving just and humane treatment for workers worldwide. ILRF works to stop child labor, promote and protect the rights of working women, end sweatshop labor, and to end violence against trade unions. In addition ILRF is focused through its SweatFree Communities campaigns on the promotion of labor rights of garment workers especially in countries like Bangladesh. Learn more at www.laborrights.org [7] and www.sweatfree.org [8].

The Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN) is a labour and women's rights organization that supports the efforts of workers in global supply chains to win improved wages and working conditions and a better quality of life. For more information, please visit www.maquilasolidarity.org [9]

The Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) works to improve conditions and support the empowerment of workers in the global garment industry. It has national campaigns in 14 European countries with a network of 250 organizations worldwide. For more information, please visit www.cleanclothes.org [10].

United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) is a student organization with chapters at over 150 universities, colleges and high schools across North America. USAS campaigns in support of service workers on our campuses and factory workers making apparel for their schools. For more information, please visit www.usas.org [11].

Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) is an independent labor rights monitoring organization, conducting investigations of working conditions in factories around the globe. The WRC is proud to have the support of over 175 college and university affiliates and its primary focus is the labor practices of factories that make apparel and other goods bearing university logos. For more information, please visit www.workersrights.org [12].

Source URL: <http://laborrights.org/creating-a-sweatfree-world/sweatshops/news/12383>

Links:

[1] <mailto:jvogt@aflcio.org>

[2] <mailto:trina.tocco@ilrf.org>

[3] <mailto:nova@workersrights.org>

[4] <mailto:ineke@cleanclothes.org>

[5] <mailto:kthomas@maquilasolidarity.org>

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