

Labor Rights Groups Urge US and European Governments to Press Apparel Brands and Retailers to Sign onto Bangladesh Fire and Building Safety Agreement

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Walmart Supplier Factory is Latest in a Series of Deadly Fires; Groups Promote Comprehensive Solution to Save Lives

Labor and human rights groups in the US and Europe [are calling on U.S. Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis](#) and European governments to press apparel brands and retailers to join the Bangladesh Fire and Building Safety Agreement, after a fire in Bangladesh claimed the lives of 112 workers at Tazreen Fashions. The purpose of the Agreement, which has been signed by PVH, owner of Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger, and German retailer Tchibo, is to prevent and correct the dangerous fire safety risks that have now resulted in more than 700 worker deaths over the past decade.

The core components of the Agreement are as follows:

- 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.

As we have seen in the recent deadly fires in Bangladesh and Pakistan, corporate-controlled monitoring has failed to protect workers' lives and unnecessary deaths will continue unless and until brands agree to an independent and binding fire and building safety program. "The Agreement we are proposing involves a number of critical elements that distinguish it from the voluntary corporate social responsibility programs that have allowed these deadly fires to continue," said Scott Nova, executive director of the Worker Rights Consortium. Tessel Pauli of the European Clean Clothes Campaign said: "Brands need to prevent anymore unnecessary factory worker deaths. Signing this Agreement and working with trade unions in Bangladesh is the first, essential step."

“Proper worker safety measures, such as those that will be required by the Bangladesh Fire and Building Safety Agreement, could go a long way toward saving lives in the case of fire, or even preventing fires from occurring. Workers need to be central to the solution, not victims of bad management.” said Judy Gearhart, executive director of the International Labor Rights Forum.

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