UPDATE: Recently we informed you about the intimidation and harassment of the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity. On July 30 2010, more criminal cases were filed against the BCWS staff and other worker leaders. On the night of August 12 2010, 20 police officers arrested Kalpona Akter and Babul Akhter. They are still being held in detention. Your urgent support is needed to stop the crackdown on the labour rights organisations.

Since the announcement of the new minimum wage proposal on July 29, the Bangladesh government has been quoted that they will not tolerate any "anarchy" in the garment sector. The minimum wage proposal of 3000 Taka, remains however insufficient to meet the basic needs of workers, who continued their protests on the streets. Arrests warrants have been issued against hundreds of workers and several labour rights leaders.

BCWS and its leaders are particular targets of this government crackdown on worker organizing, blamed for "fomenting unrest and agitation in the garment sector" in an official government brief. Kalpona Akter and Babul Akhter were arrested on unsubstantiated charges. Police have been threatening their family members with beatings, harassing colleagues, and attempting various forms of deception in order to identify their place of hiding. We are seriously worried about the physical safety of the BCWS leaders as well as that of their families and colleagues, fearing inhumane and degrading treatment at the hand of the authorities.

New minimum wage proposal
On July 30, the Bangladesh government announced its proposal to raise the minimum monthly wage to 3000 Taka (€32), effective November 1, 2010. Of that amount, 2,000 takas would be the basic pay while 800 takas would be paid in house rent and 200 takas in health allowance. The apprentice level wage would increase to 2,500 takas (€27), up from the present 1,200 takas (€13).

The announcement of the new minimum wage structure was a bitter disappointment to workers who had demanded the 5,000 takas ($72) monthly wage. Worker leaders have been clear that 3000 Taka is not enough to cover the basic needs of the garment workers and their families, and doesn't cover the huge increase in living costs of the recent years.

In addition, there is great concern that the new minimum wage will not be implemented as soon as possible. If only effective on November 1, the current proposed date for implementation, workers will receive a lower annual bonus at the Eid festival* early September, as this is based upon the minimum wage.

*Muslim holiday (End of Ramadan)

**Arrest warrants**

Following the announcement of the new minimum wage proposal, workers continued their protests in the streets. Violent clashes between workers and the police resulted in many arrests, and against thousands of workers cases, often anonymously, have been filed. The Bangladesh government is cited in newspapers accusing "provocateurs", "saboteurs" and even "terrorists" to be manipulating workers to riot, thereby ignoring the genuine struggles of the workers.

On the 31st July a Bangladesh newspaper released a list of 10 people wanted by the government in connection with the unrest, including Kalpona Akter, Babul Akhter and another man working as a trade union adviser, Mr Montu Ghosh. Mr Ghosh was arrested on the evening of the 30th July. Other union leaders reportedly named in the charges are: Mahbub Islam, Bazlur Rashid Feruz, Moshrefa Mishu, Sultan Bahar, Nasim Nasrin, Ruhul Amin and Abul Hossain.

**Nassa Global Wear**

The immediate cause of the cancellation of BCWS’s legal status may be related to BCWS supporting workers in their effort to form an independent trade union at one particular garment factory, Nassa Global Wear. Nassa workers contacted BCWS in April, 2010, to receive support and help with conflict resolution. The company owners are retired military officers who may have used their political influence to have BCWS’s non-governmental organization registration revoked. While the NGO Affairs Bureau did not officially notify BCWS of the cancellation of its legal status until June 10, one week after the fact, Nassa managers knew about it earlier, and informed its workers on June 6—four days before BCWS received notification—that they expected BCWS to be closed down.

On June 19, three days after Mr. Islam was detained and beaten by national security police, Nassa reportedly filed criminal charges against two members of the BCWS staff, including Mr. Islam, and 57 workers, claiming they had beaten managers, vandalized the factory, and stolen property. According to BCWS, the case was filed in the Ashulia Police Station with Babul Akhter and Aminul Islam the principal defendants. BCWS reported continued unrest at Nassa, including workers beaten by "local goons" both inside and outside the factory. On July 22, BCWS wrote that an estimated 40 workers were injured at Nassa, breaking news on Bangladeshi television.

Nassa Global Wear reportedly produces for several European and American brands, including Walmart,
Carrefour, Tesco, and H&M. BCWS says it has discussed the case with Walmart's Bangladesh office.

See for more information also:

- Sweatfree Communities: [http://www.sweatfree.org/bcwsalert-7-2010](http://www.sweatfree.org/bcwsalert-7-2010)

this appeal is now closed

Letter to government

Your Excellency,

I write to express grave concern regarding the recent crackdown against the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS) and other labour rights leaders.

I am particularly alarmed to hear of the arrests of Ms. Kalpona Akter, Mr. Babul Akhter, of the BCWS. I am shocked to hear that family members have been harassed and threatened with violence by police officers. Previous reports of the unjust detention and beating of Mr. Islam, who was held in NSI (National Security Intelligence) custody on June 16, 2010, and the de-registration of BCWS at the NGO Affairs Bureau on June 3rd 2010, make it clear to me that the safety and rights of these labour advocates are not guaranteed. Also it is reported that cases have been filed against other worker leaders including Montu Ghosh, Mahbub Islam, Bazlur Rashid Feruz, Moshrefa Mishu, Sultan Bahar, Nasim Nasrin, Ruhul Amin and Abul Hossain.

It is my understanding that BCWS leaders have been accused by your government of inciting worker unrest. BCWS is an internationally known and well respected advocate for workers’ rights with a strong record in credible research and professionalism. It is unacceptable for your government to target trade unions and labour rights organisations for defending the legitimate demands of garment workers in Bangladesh.

Therefore I call upon your government to:

1. Stop the repression of workers and worker leaders who protest against the low wages in the garment industry.
2. Ensure the withdrawal of criminal charges of fomenting labour unrest filed against labour rights advocates and worker organisers, including Ms Kalpona Akter and Mr. Babul Akhter of the BCWS.
3. Release the arrested labour leaders and garment workers, and withdraw charges against anonymous workers.
4. Immediately withdraw the cancellation letter of June 3, 2010, and restore BCWS's NGO registration with the NGO Affairs Bureau (NAB), and put a halt to any action aiming at the termination of their organisation.
5. Provide BCWS staff members and their families with assurances of their safety.

I hope that you will resolve this situation immediately and recommit yourself to allowing labour rights organizations to operate freely without fear of reprisal.

Yours sincerely,

Letter to Nassa group

Dear Sir, Madam,

I write to express grave concern regarding the recent crackdown against the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity...
Solidarity (BCWS), and the role that your company has played in this.

I understand that you have been telling workers at Nassa Global Wear that the BCWS would be closed down, days before the organization received a notification concerning its legal registration. In addition, you reportedly filed criminal charges against two members of the BCWS staff, including Mr. Islam, and 57 workers, claiming they had beaten managers, vandalized the factory, and stolen property. Finally I learned that at least at one occasion workers were beaten by local goons both inside and outside your factory.

It seems clear that your company is intimidating workers and targeting BCWS to stop workers from demanding their labour rights, including the right to organize. I would like to stress that consumers worldwide expect their garments to be made under decent working conditions. The BCWS is an internationally known and well respected advocate for workers' rights, that strives after the same goal.

I urgently call upon you immediately stop all harmful actions against the BCWS, including the withdrawal of the charges filed on June 19.

Yours sincerely,

Filed under: union repression Bangladesh