Following the end of a two day conference on Living Wages in Berlin the Clean Clothes Campaign cautiously welcomes the steps taken and hopes that the Declaration of Intent signed by the stakeholders present will mark a shift towards actual implementation of a living wage payment for all garment workers.

The conference was convened by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and brought together business, international organisations, NGOs and trade unions.

Clean Clothes Campaign and our partners in the Asia Floor Wage and the Bangladesh National Garment Workers Federation were in attendance.

In line with the UN Guiding Principles of Business and Human Rights, the Declaration of Intent calls upon all stakeholders to “show their commitment to realizing living wages in international supply chains.” It also provides a “shared understanding of the concept of a living wage and it's importance.”

Ashim Roy from the Asia Floor Wage Alliance said on the conference “it is a good step forward in bringing a focus on the living wage which was absent from the discourse of the companies. It is positive that the Dutch and German Governments are endorsing this shift towards more concrete forms of implementing a living wage. However this will prove difficult and not go uncontested without operationalization of the living wage concept. We urge buyers to enter into dialogue and negotiation with representatives of unions at both the sourcing country level and the factory level”

The Declaration also calls for sourcing companies to “respect, promote and co-create a living wage.” Amin Amirul Haque of the National Garment Workers Federation in Bangladesh summed up the hopes of many of the participants when he said “As a trade union we are fighting for the living wage, and so we welcome this conference, we hope now to see continuation and follow up on the Declaration on the factory floors in
Bangladesh.

The Clean Clothes Campaign has been campaigning for a living wage for a number of years with partners across garment producing countries. Jeroen Merk of Clean Clothes Campaign who attended the conference said “We appreciate the commitment from this broad group of participants and are pleased to see that the Dutch and German governments recognise the urgent need for a living wage in the garment industry”

Niki Janssen of Schone Kleren Campagne said after the meeting. “This is the first step. Clean Clothes Campaign will closely monitor the process and keep companies accountable to respect, promote and protect a living wage for all garment workers, and encourage governments to step up their role in protecting the human rights of workers – especially the right to a living wage”

Filed under: living wage Asia Floor Wage