

Bangladesh Garment Workers' Conditions

Kalpona Akter, Executive Director of the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity to visit Canada from November 24 to December 6, 2013

From November 24 to December 6, 2013, Kalpona Akter, Executive Director of the Bangladesh Centre for Worker Solidarity (BCWS) will be visiting Vancouver, Ottawa, Québec City, Montréal and Toronto at the invitation of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), the Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN), and the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) Social Justice Fund.

The main objectives of Kalpona's visit to Canada are to:

- Raise awareness among union members, students, members of South Asian community and the general public of the current situation of Bangladeshi garment workers, and particularly the situation of the victims of the Rana Plaza and other recent factory disasters;
- Increase pressure on Canadian companies linked to Rana Plaza and/or other recent factory tragedies to provide just compensation to the victims, and on all Canadian companies sourcing apparel from Bangladesh to sign the Accord on Fire and Building Safety; and
- Encourage the Canadian government to provide incentives to the Bangladeshi government to improve its labour legislation and implementation of that legislation in order that workers can exercise their rights without government or employer interference.

Kalpona Akter, Executive Director, Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS)

Kalpona started working as a garment worker when she was 12 years old; at age 16, she was fired for trying to organize a union in her factory. In 2001, she and two other former garment workers founded the Bangladesh Centre for Worker Solidarity (BCWS), which conducts labour rights and leadership training for garment workers and advocates for their rights.

Kalpona and other BCWS members have been subjected to serious repression for their work – including her detention, along with two other leaders of the group, the murder of one of their leaders, Aminul Islam, and the revoking of the organization's legal status – but international solidarity has helped to win Kalpona and her co-workers' release and to regain the organization's legal status.

Recently, the BCWS has been providing support to the victims of the Rana Plaza building collapse, in which over 1,100 garment workers were killed and over 1,600 injured. They are lobbying for just compensation for all the victims of the disaster and for brands and for retailers to sign the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh.

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