

# WHAT'S TO BE DONE? WHAT CAN WE DO?

## **Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh**

If there is anything positive that has come out of the Rana Plaza disaster it's that consumers in North America and Europe now clearly understand the real cost of fast (and cheap) fashion. As a result, brands and retailers have been put on notice that they must take serious action to ensure that the workers who make their products don't have to risk their lives to do so.

The Global Unions IndustriALL and UNI, Bangladeshi unions, and labour rights NGOs have been campaigning to convince major apparel brands to sign the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh in order to prevent similar disasters from happening in the future.

Unlike voluntary codes of conduct and company-controlled factory auditing programs, the Accord is a legally binding agreement signed by the Global and Bangladeshi unions and the brands and retailers, with four labour rights NGOs signing as witnesses.

To date, over 100 major brands and retailers from Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, Hong Kong, and Japan have signed the Accord. However, only one Canadian company – Loblaw's – has become a signatory.

The Accord provides for independent factory inspections, democratically elected health and safety committees, health and safety workers and management training in which unions play a role, an anonymous complaint system and the right of workers to refuse unsafe work. In addition, when serious safety hazards are identified, the brands and retailers using the factory must underwrite the cost of necessary factory upgrades.

Another group of North American companies, including Gap, Walmart, the Hudson's Bay Company, Canadian Tire, and others, have formed an alternative initiative – the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety – yet another self-regulatory scheme in which the companies control the monitoring and training with no role for unions or workers, and little transparency for consumers.

## **Changes in government policy needed**

Because Bangladesh is considered a Least Developed Country (LDC), the Canadian government provides duty-free access to the Canadian market for all apparel products imported from Bangladesh. However, the Canadian government does not require that Bangladesh meet minimal labour standards conditions in order to maintain duty-free access.

Bangladeshi workers need and deserve employment opportunities, but they also deserve decent wages and working conditions and respect for their rights.

See other side for more



As Canadian citizens, we should urge the federal government to do the following:

1. Send a clear message to the government of Bangladesh that continued duty-free access for apparel products to the Canadian market depends on improvements to Bangladeshi labour laws and their enforcement, particularly concerning the right of workers in the garment sector to organize trade unions and bargain collectively without employer or government interference.
2. Call on all Canadian companies that source apparel products from Bangladesh to sign the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh.

As union members and consumers, we should demand accountability of Canadian retailers and brands by doing the following:

1. Sign online petitions calling on Canadian companies that sourced from Rana Plaza and Tazreen factories to provide just compensation to the victims without further delay.
2. When you see “Made in Bangladesh” labels on clothes where you shop, ask the store clerk whether their company has signed the Accord, and if not, why not.
3. Join campaigns supporting workers’ efforts to organize and bargain collectively and pressuring companies to pay prices to their suppliers that allow them to pay a living wage.

**For campaign information click on the following links:**

[www.maquilasolidarity.org](http://www.maquilasolidarity.org)

[www.cleanclothes.org](http://www.cleanclothes.org)

<http://www.industriall-union.org/>