



The Honourable Excellency Ms Abida Islam

Bangladesh High Commission
28 Queen's Gate
London SW7 5JA
United Kingdom

Date: 24 April 2025

Regarding: Ensuring trade union freedom and worker rights in RMG sector

Dear Honourable Ambassador,

We are writing to you on behalf of a coalition of UK trade unions and civil society organisations to request your urgent support in improving labour rights and trade union freedoms in the RMG industry in Bangladesh. In particular, we are asking that you support demands to drop the charges still levied against workers and trade unionists who participated in the 2023 wage protests, and to instigate wage and labour law reforms that will see real change for RMG workers.

An urgent need to review minimum wages for the RMG sector

Today marks twelve years since the Rana Plaza building collapsed in Savar, and workers in Bangladesh factories are still fighting for their basic rights and freedoms, such as a living wage, the right to join a union without fear, safety in their workplaces and more. These issues are at the root of why factory disasters remain a risk. The interim government have an opportunity to start a labour law reform process and put in place the systems necessary to intentionally increase wages, year on year. We stand in support of Bangladeshi union demands, submitted through your Labour Reform Commission, to see immediate action to increase wages and ensure legislative change to support trade union freedoms and rights.

Dropping charges still pending over 40,000 workers and trade unionists

In late 2023, worker protests took place in Bangladesh related to the wage setting in the RMG industry. Many tens of thousands of workers took to the streets over low pay in the sector, but were met with violence and legal retaliation by both industry and government.

Many factories responded to worker protests by filing mass criminal complaints against hundreds of both named and, mostly, unnamed workers, without any credible evidence of individual responsibility. 37 First Information Reports (FIRs) were filed that we have documented, that collectively place more than 40,000 workers at risk of false arrest. Only 8 have been dropped following pressure from campaigners, supply chain actors and brands.

The filing of baseless criminal cases that accuse workers generically, and without individualized evidence, of inciting vandalism and other serious crimes is a page from the well-worn playbook to repress freedom of association and maintain poverty wages in the industry. Trade unions in Bangladesh continue to identify the existence of these cases as a key barrier to worker organising for change and a marker of the continued repression of human rights in the sector.

We are therefore writing to ask that you share our concerns with the interim government, and extend our request that they issue an executive order that unilaterally drops the political harassment cases taken against worker groups following the garment worker wage protests in late 2023. This request would be in support of an agreement already signed by worker representatives, the BGMEA, and representatives from the interim government in September last year – the 18-point plan.

Thank you in advance for your attention to these important matters. We look forward to receiving your response in due course and continuing a productive dialogue.

Sincerely,

Organisational Signatories:

- Dave Ward, General Secretary, CWU
- Gary Smith, General Secretary, GMB
- Barbara Plant, President, GMB
- John Moloney, Assistant General Secretary, PCS
- Stephen Guy, Chair, Durham Miners Association
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- Nick Crook, Head of International, UNISON
- Anna Bryher, Labour Behind the Label
- Jay Kerr, No Sweat
- Asad Rehman, War on Want

- Hayley Franco, Re-make UK
- Helen Moulinos, Chief Executive Officer, Anti-Slavery International
- Nick Dearden, Global Justice Now
- Ruth Bergan, Transform Trade
- Peter Frankental, Programme Director Economic Affairs, Amnesty International UK
- Shanta Bhavnani, Ethical Consumer
- Louise Davies, Chief Executive, Scottish Fair Trade
- Caroline Downey, Executive Director, Women Working Worldwide
- Dominique Muller, Director, Corporate Justice Coalition
- Tracy Doig, Head of Advocacy and Campaigns, The Circle
- Tamara Cincik, CEO of Fashion Roundtable
- Beth Davy-Day | Creative Director, Fashion Enter
- Sarah Jay, Executive Director, Fashion Revolution
- Francesco Sani, Deputy Branch Secretary DMU UCU
- Paul Stewart, secretary, Unison Housing & Care Scotland Branch
- Kevin Treweeks, Branch Secretary, Plymouth in UNISON

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