

United States Senate

COMMITTEES:
BANKING, HOUSING
AND URBAN AFFAIRS
FOREIGN RELATIONS
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

December 2, 2013

The Honorable Carl Levin
Chairman
Senate Committee on Armed Services
228 Senate Russell Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable James M. Inhofe
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Armed Services
228 Senate Russell Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Levin and Inhofe,

I am writing to express my strong concern regarding attempts to include language in the National Defense Authorization Act that would require the Department of Defense's defense commissary and exchange store system source garments only from suppliers that are signatories of the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh. If so, this amendment unjustifiably discriminates against U.S. garment manufacturers and retailers in favor of European garment manufacturers and retailers.

In response to recent disasters at Bangladeshi garment factories in which many workers lost their lives, U.S. and Canadian retailers, brands and manufacturers formed the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety ("Alliance") to improve worker safety in Bangladesh. European companies formed the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety ("Accord"). Both the Alliance and Accord are working to address these concerns in Bangladeshi garment factories. In fact, the Alliance reports they have made significant progress on inspecting factories, establishing programs for building remediation and worker displacement and providing assistance on fire and safety standards in Bangladesh.

I would be concerned if any provision in the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2014 contained language that would require preference for European companies over U.S. companies, especially since it is our understanding that U.S. companies have done as much or more on the ground to fix the safety and health problems in Bangladeshi garment factories. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a hearing on this matter in July. We heard from government, industry, and labor witnesses all of whom stressed the importance of developing a common approach to labor safety in Bangladesh. I would be concerned by any action by the U.S. government that would intentionally or unintentionally divide this effort by explicitly favoring the European sponsored Accord over the U.S.-led Alliance. Such an action would undermine current efforts by the Accord and Alliance to work together on the development of joint technical standards, training and inspection protocols, and undermine cooperation among the Government of Bangladesh, the U.S. government and European governments.

I urge you to reject language that would favor European companies in the Accord at the expense of U.S. companies in the Alliance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "B. Corker", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bob Corker
Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Relations