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I. Introduction

The AFL-CIO, on behalf of its 57 affiliated unions, appreciates this opportunity to testify on Labor Issues in Bangladesh. We represent workers in every industry and economic sector, from manufacturing to mining to services. Collaborating with working people around the world, we work to improve labor laws, increase compliance with labor provisions of trade and preference agreements, and empower workers to improve their own lives and conditions of work.

Bangladesh, with nearly 150 million inhabitants, is a low-income country that aspires to become a middle income country by 2021. The State Dept has documented numerous and persistent human rights abuses in Bangladesh, the most significant being “enforced disappearances, discrimination against marginalized groups, and poor working conditions and labor rights.”¹ It is against this backdrop that Bangladesh’s garment sector—its export growth engine—sits, employing about 4 million workers, over 80 percent of them women, many of them young and not fully literate. Workers in this sector earn about \$38 a month, the global low for the industry, yet they sew for some of the world’s best-known brands.

Bangladesh was most likely not on most American consumer’s radar a year or two ago, but that no longer the case. The catastrophic collapse of the Rana Plaza Building which killed 1,129 Bangladeshis, mostly young women, on April 24, has raised this least developed country’s profile—and created an opportunity that’s being called a “turning point.”

This is indeed a critical moment for Bangladesh. If the Government, factory owners, and international brands cooperate to make profound reforms to “business as usual” in Bangladesh, committing to enforceable standards for workplace safety and worker rights, it can be the point at which brand Bangladesh begins to grow in stature. If instead, this moment is not seized, and a

¹ Department of State, “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012: Bangladesh,” available at: <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>.

flurry of unenforceable promises are made in order to obscure the fact that little will change for Bangladesh's workers, this moment will not be remembered, but will simply become another in a long line of preventable tragedies for which the world's most vulnerable bear the costs.

Achieving real change for Bangladesh's workers will require determination and follow through by both the public and private sectors. The U.S. Government must take action on the petition to limit or suspend Bangladesh's benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences to signal to the Bangladesh Government that its lack of progress will no longer be tolerated and that substantial changes to its labor regime are necessary. And the U.S. brands who source in Bangladesh, but who have so far refused to sign on to the Accord on Factory and Building Safety in Bangladesh, must also join in the binding agreement to protect the very workers whose daily efforts create the brand's products—voluntary compliance plans, which do not work, are not an acceptable substitute.

II. Overview

Many of Bangladesh's 4 million garment workers, the vast majority of whom are young women, risk their lives every day, working in thousands of unregulated and often poorly constructed factories. Their contribution to the \$19 billion garment industry has been rewarded by abysmally low wages, consistent denial of internationally recognized rights, and workplace conditions reminiscent of the U.S. sweatshops of 100 years ago. Their jobs can literally kill them.

The U.S. and Bangladesh governments have for years talked about improving the situation for workers. Likewise, Bangladesh's employers and international brands have explained their commitments to protecting workers and upholding standards. Despite the creation of a plethora of committees, working groups, and voluntary compliance programs, the unacceptable labor conditions and practices remain.

In the last 15 months alone:

- labor organizer Aminul Islam was tortured and murdered in April 2012—the case remains unsolved and key leads have apparently been dropped
- a deadly fire at Tazreen Fashions in November 2012 killed at least 112 workers in conditions strikingly similar to the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire
- forty-four factory fire incidents have occurred since the Tazreen fire, many of which caused injuries as workers sought to escape blocked exits, and three of which were deadly—the most recent factory fire, which injured 20 workers, occurred on May 22
- many of the workers who have successfully registered new unions during 2013 (22 new unions in the ready-made garment sector, for example) have faced termination and other anti-union discrimination; none have been able to secure formal collective bargaining agreements (though there have been spot agreements on specific issues)
- thousands of workers have engaged in protests over poor and unsafe working conditions and non-payment of wages—many of the protests could have been avoided if workers had effective mechanisms to solve workplace disputes in an orderly fashion
- the Rana Plaza building, which contained several garment factories, collapsed, killing 1,129 workers and injuring at least 1,500 more—the deaths and injuries could have been

avoided if the workers who saw the cracks and at first refused to enter the building had not been forced to work by employer threats to fire them or withhold their pay

- the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, which is performing a survey of garment factories in Bangladesh, reported that 60 percent of the buildings housing factories are vulnerable to collapse²

It is worth noting that *three of the four worst disasters in the history of the global apparel industry have happened in the last eight months*, two of them (**Rana Plaza** and **Tazreen Fashions**) in Bangladesh.³ Bangladesh's labor practices and working conditions have been at issue for more than 20 years⁴—and yet these recent catastrophes leave no doubt that the current approach (weak to non-existent governmental efforts combined with voluntary corporate compliance programs) is an abject failure.

The problems that workers face in asserting their rights in Bangladesh are complex—but not insoluble. To make real changes for workers—who should not be forced to choose between working in a deathtrap and having no job at all—will take a truly tripartite effort, in which workers, business interests, and the relevant governments agree to work together to implement a high-road approach to economic development in Bangladesh.

While it is of course the responsibility of the Government of Bangladesh to adopt, maintain, and enforce laws that secure fundamental labor rights for its workers, workers and employers are critical partners in that effort. When workers are free to form unions and exercise labor union rights without fear of recrimination, workers become full partners in creating safer workplaces and higher productivity. Likewise, employers are critical partners—particularly when applicable labor laws and practices are strong and effective enough to deter those who would otherwise cut corners on safety and deny rights to their workers. Employers who cooperate in labor law compliance reap benefits as well, in the form of more productive workers with increased longevity (instead of workers who jump from factory to factory looking for better wages and working conditions).

In Bangladesh, the role of the employers is severely constrained by the pressure they face to minimize costs in order to win contracts from global brands that form part of the \$1.5 trillion international fashion industry. The global fashion industry pays rates that, in effect, *cause* the very problems that plague Bangladesh's factories and their workers. Some factories may wish to do the right thing, but feel they cannot afford to do so. Individual factories that invested in needed repairs and upgrades would be unable to charge competitive prices and would soon find

² Jason Burke, "Majority of Bangladesh Garment Factories "Vulnerable to Collapse," in *The Guardian*, June 3, 2013, available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jun/03/bangladesh-garment-factories-vulnerable-collapse>.

³ See, e.g., Esther Bintliff, "On Bangladesh, and Some of the Worst Factory Disasters in History," *The Financial Times*, Apr. 25, 2013, available at: <http://blogs.ft.com/the-world/2013/04/on-bangladesh-and-some-of-the-worst-factory-disasters-in-history/>.

⁴ See Section IV of this document for a history of labor law and practice complaints against the Government of Bangladesh.

themselves out of business. To resolve this “prisoner’s dilemma,” the international brands must take responsibility for their role in Bangladesh’s low-road, no-rights development model.⁵

This is why the AFL-CIO, along with partners including Industrial, UNI Global Union, the Worker Rights Consortium, the Clean Clothes Campaign, United Students Against Sweatshops, the International Labor Rights Forum, and others, has strongly endorsed the **Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh**, already signed by more than 40 major brands including American brands PVH (parent company of Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger), Sean John, and Abercrombie & Fitch. This historic Accord is a **binding** agreement regarding workplace fire and building safety in Bangladesh, which means it has a chance to make a real difference instead of papering over problems with certificates and audits that bear little relation to the real conditions prevailing in Bangladesh’s factories.

The agreement guarantees worker participation through representative organizations, recognizes the role of government and takes measures to combat corruption by requiring rigorous inspections, transparent reporting of audits, and public oversight of results. This agreement offers an integrated and sustainable solution. Brands that have signed it have recognized that cutting and running from the problems the fashion industry helped to create in Bangladesh is simply not an option.

The existence of this new binding Accord also serves to underscore the role of the Government. The agreement is likely to have little practical impact if workers are not allowed to organize and act collectively. Organized workers are empowered to stand up for their own safety and rights. However, they can only do so if the Government of Bangladesh turns its words of support for labor rights into active, effective efforts to defend those rights—which includes changes in labor law and in enforcement regimes. Mere lip service will only result in the status quo, in which impoverished young women take their lives into their hands every single day just by going to work.

III. International Brands Cannot Avoid Responsibility for Their Role in Denying Bangladesh’s Workers Safe Workplaces and Free Exercise of Rights

While all participants in the supply chain—suppliers, brands, and especially workers—have a role to play in ensuring that workplace safety and respect for international labor standards improve, the role of international brands is especially critical. Brands have the financial leverage to incentivize meaningful change. The question is whether or not they will.

While state-of-the-art factories do not happen overnight, the **binding and legally enforceable Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh** ensures that owners will repair factories or lose access to contracts. It also ensures that multi-million dollar international brands pay their fair share of the costs. Importantly, the agreement will strengthen workers’ right to organize and defend their own rights—including the right to refuse to enter or remain in an unsafe workplace.

⁵ As explained in detail in Section III, existing corporate social responsibility programs, which include corporate codes of conduct, workplace monitoring, audits, factory certifications, and related initiatives simply **do not work**. These types of programs have had a chance to work in Bangladesh for years—with no appreciable impact.

Clothing brands that have sourced from Bangladesh over the past two decades have made plentiful profits based on the world's lowest wages and most dangerous conditions. Instead of now leaving this developing country and its workers with the mess created by the "race to the bottom" of the global fashion industry, international brands must stay in Bangladesh and help usher in a "high road" strategy.

While more than 40 global brands have signed the Accord, including three leading American brands (PVH, Sean John, and Abercrombie & Fitch), many other leading American brands, including the Gap, Wal-Mart, Target, and JCPenney have not.

Reportedly, Wal-Mart and the Gap are joining other unnamed brands to develop an alternative proposal.⁶ The AFL-CIO strongly believes there is no need for an additional proposal. The new effort reportedly includes no worker input, merely "representatives from retailers and brands, as well as participants from industry associations."⁷ An agreement that does not include workers in its development is likely to lack buy-in and exclude provisions to ensure worker engagement and empowerment. Given that workers are the best monitors of their own safety, this omission is critical.

It is unclear what an alternative proposal would achieve. If it were to create binding but different standards, that would only complicate compliance and enforcement for Bangladeshi factories and their employees—how would workers (many of them illiterate) know which safety regime applied to their workplace at any given time?

The AFL-CIO's bigger concern, however, is that any new proposal would create voluntary, rather than binding standards. Unfortunately, as the AFL-CIO demonstrated in its recent publication *Responsibility Outsourced: Social Audits, Workplace Certification and Twenty Years of Failure to Protect Worker Rights*,⁸ voluntary standards don't work.

Voluntary corporate social responsibility (CSR) standards have problems with governance, transparency, proper inspection methodology, independent conciliation and mediation involving unions, and long-term commitments by global brands. Their unilateral nature fails to provide meaningful roles for governments and workers—and certainly does not "empower" workers to become leaders in creating safe and productive workplaces.

For example, while the programs may require "audits," these

audits spot some very particular and relatively easy to identify problems, but even then there usually are no consequences for noncompliance or rewards for improvements. Harder-to-spot problems related to gender discrimination or

⁶ See, e.g., Matthew Mosk, "Wal-Mart, Gap Propose Alternate Bangladesh Safety Program," *ABC News*, May 31, 2013, available at: http://news.yahoo.com/wal-mart-gap-propose-alternate-bangladesh-safety-program-195604087--abc-news-topstories.html;_ylt=AwrNUbDmEKIRYEEAs3z_wgt..

⁷ "Leading North American Retailers and Brands to Address Systemic Safety Issues for Workers in Bangladesh Garment Factories," Press Release, Bipartisan Policy Center, May 30, 2013, available at: <http://bipartisanpolicy.org/news/press-releases/2013/05/leading-north-american-retailers-and-brands-address-systemic-safety-issu>.

⁸ Available here: <http://www.aflcio.org/content/download/77061/1902391/CSReport.pdf>

freedom of association remain invisible. As few auditors come from backgrounds sensitive to these issues and often do not understand what freedom of association means.⁹

For example, Ali Enterprises in Pakistan, site of a September 2012 fire that was one of the four deadliest disasters in the history of the garment industry, had been newly awarded an “SA8000” certificate by Social Accountability International (SAI), a multi-stakeholder initiative operating in the social audit industry.¹⁰ But the certificate clearly did not provide safety for the nearly 300 workers killed in the fire.¹¹ Likewise, various programs had audited Tazreen Fashions and Rana Plaza—none of which helped save the workers employed there.

Twenty years of evidence of evidence from Bangladesh and other developing countries demonstrates that corporate social responsibility programs, which are based “mainly on short and cursory visits to factories and no proper discussion with workers . . . will never achieve decent, secure jobs for the millions of workers at the sharp end of the global economy.”¹²

In addition, the voluntary nature of these programs means that brands can change, weaken, or drop the programs at any time, leaving workers in the lurch. To the extent that local factories and the Government of Bangladesh begin to engage in efforts to improve labor conditions and secure rights for workers, voluntary programs that can be withdrawn at any time could harm these efforts.

While the diversity of CSR programs means that each may have stronger and weaker elements, the AFL-CIO report makes clear that where workers are represented in the process, especially through unionism, the chances of success are real, while corporate-driver initiatives have largely failed to deliver for working people and their communities.¹³

The global industry that played a role in creating the conditions in Bangladesh’s garment industry must play a role in fixing it, not outsource that role to compliance firms or abandon Bangladesh’s workers altogether. A voluntary system that brands can walk away from as soon as the buzz about Rana Plaza dies down is not the answer. The AFL-CIO urges North American brands to join the existing and enforceable Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh rather than create a new proposal that has the potential to confuse and undermine progress the Accord has the potential to achieve.

⁹ *Id.*, at 28.

¹⁰ *Id.*, at 37.

¹¹ As detailed in the AFL-CIO report, SAI does not “directly audit many factories or directly certify brands.” Instead, it mainly designs and markets a system meant to provide consumers and retailers with the confidence that a product has been produced in a social responsible manner. *See id.*, p. 31.

¹² *Id.*, at 1 (Sharan Burrow, Foreward)

¹³ *Id.*, at 6.

IV. The AFL-CIO Encourages the U.S. Government to Withdraw Benefits from Bangladesh Pursuant to Section 19 U.S.C. § 2462(D) of the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)

The AFL-CIO's work to secure labor rights for Bangladeshi workers through the GSP process has a long history. Since 1990, the AFL-CIO has filed five separate GSP petitions related to systemic and widespread violations of internationally recognized worker rights, in law and in practice, in Bangladesh (with filings raising new issues beginning in 1990, 1999, 2004, 2005, and 2007). Each time, the AFL-CIO believes that the Government of Bangladesh failed to make meaningful progress on the adoption and enforcement of internationally recognized worker rights. Instead, following each new petition, the Government would make promises and adopt measures to give the appearance of sincerity about worker rights. But implementation was delayed and enforcement was weak to non-existent.

The most recent petition was filed in 2007, and included evidence that workers had been threatened, arbitrarily arrested, and even tortured for trade union activity. The United States Trade Representative (USTR) accepted the petition for review on September 6, 2007 and subsequently placed Bangladesh under "continuing review" to monitor the progress of the Government of Bangladesh toward a set of worker rights benchmarks elaborated in a 2008 demarche. The decision to place Bangladesh under review, combined with the subsequent engagement of the U.S. Government, succeeded in pushing the Government of Bangladesh and employers to take some initial efforts on behalf of workers. Unfortunately, the Government of Bangladesh's efforts have been neither sustained nor effective. It has been, in effect, a case of one step forward, two steps back.

For example, in the shrimp sector, the Government of Bangladesh, around 2010, allowed some independent unions to register. However, employers reportedly then subjected the new unions to a union-busting campaign, including a press conference organized by employers at which they reportedly denounced the labor organizations that had helped the workers to form the unions, as well as local labor authorities. The Government failed to defend worker rights, and all progress on organizing independent unions in the sector ceased. To our knowledge, only one independent union in the sector is still in operation.

Similarly, a prior GSP case, the Government agreed to a new law allowing some freedom of association in the country's Export Processing Zones (EPZs). A new law established the right of workers to form worker associations in the EPZs. The associations were supposed to be a step on the road toward granting full freedom of association, organization, and collective bargaining rights for all EPZ workers. Unfortunately, that commitment, like so many others, stalled.

These associations continue to be denied the right to effectively collectively bargain (there are no existing collective bargaining agreements in the EPZs, nor any reports of bargaining), to form federations, or link with unions or other organizations outside the zones from whom they can draw technical expertise and other support. Workers in some zone factories, including in the largest EPZ employer, report that they continue to be denied the right to hold an election to create an association. The Government has failed to fulfill its commitment to provide access to labor conciliators in the EPZs as promised. Workers have even reported the use of a zone

“blacklist,” which violates the right of freedom of association by discriminating against workers for union preference or activity. When workers have reported instances of anti-union discrimination in the EPZs, the BEPZA—which has full authority over labor relations in EPZs, rather than the Ministry of Labor—has usually failed to act on their behalf.

Either the BEPZA or the Government of Bangladesh can address most of these failures by simply changing current practice or by issuing a new rule or regulation, but neither entity has done so.¹⁴ This choice to leave Bangladeshi workers without the ability to exercise their internationally recognized worker rights indicates that the current Government lacks sufficient political will to act.

Given the issues documented in its 2007 GSP petition and numerous subsequent filings, it is the view of the AFL-CIO that the Government of Bangladesh is not “taking steps to afford to workers in [Bangladesh] (including any designated zone in that country) internationally recognized worker rights” (as required by 19 U.S.C. § 2462(c)(7)), and that GSP benefits should be withdrawn. It is our sincere belief that the Government of Bangladesh has exhausted any “benefit of the doubt” and that at this point, the only recourse left is to spur the Government of Bangladesh to protect Bangladesh’s workers by limiting, suspending, or withdrawing GSP benefits pursuant to U.S. law.

The GSP facility provides a critical mechanism to pressure recalcitrant governments to take clear and concrete actions to afford workers their internationally recognized worker rights. The labor eligibility criteria for the GSP program exist for very important reasons, including the desire to promote fundamental labor rights, which are positively linked with a country’s development¹⁵ and the desire to prevent a beneficiary country from unfairly undercutting workers in every other country in the world (including the U.S.) by abusing, or permitting the abuse of, its workers. If such behavior were allowed to proliferate, it would only exacerbate the “race to the bottom,” in which countries compete for investment by weakening their labor rights regimes. Such a race may indeed lower costs—but it also suppresses consumer demand, interferes with the formation and growth of the middle class, and undermines the fundamental human rights as laid out by the International Labor Organization and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Some opponents of Presidential action on the GSP have argued that it will only further harm workers by throwing them out of work. Such arguments are speculative.¹⁶ More importantly, they present a false choice, as if the only options for Bangladesh’s millions of workers are to work in deathtraps, with meager wages and no rights, or to have rights, but no jobs. Clearly, other alternatives are possible, including a Bangladesh in which workers are secure enough in their rights to advocate for their own welfare, health, and safety on the job.

¹⁴ EPZ Workers Welfare Association/Society and Industrial Relations Act (EWWAIRA) in 2010 Section 90. (“Powers to make rules and regulations.- (1) The Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, make rules for carrying out the purposes of this Act. (2) The Authority may, with previous approval of the Government, by notification in the Official Gazette, make regulations for carrying out the purposes of this Act.”)

¹⁵ See, e.g., Thomas I. Palley, “The Economic Case for International Labour Standards,” *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2004.

¹⁶ For example, the ready-made garment sector, by far Bangladesh’s leading export sector, does *not* receive GSP benefits and seems unlikely to experience job loss as a result of changes in Bangladesh’s GSP benefits.

Other opponents to GSP limitation, suspension, or withdrawal argue that any change to Bangladesh's current benefits will result in lost leverage in the effort to improve labor rights for Bangladesh's workers. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Leverage under current conditions is almost certainly already gone. The Bangladesh brand is *already* tarnished. A recent Harris Interactive Poll revealed that almost 70% of Americans had heard of the Rana Plaza collapse and almost 40% said they will be less likely to buy clothes made in Bangladesh.¹⁷ A number of well-known brands, quite aware of the ongoing labor abuses, have not sourced from Bangladesh for some time, and some, Disney being the most public, have made recent announcements to ensure their customers know they do not source there.

Decisions not to produce in Bangladesh do *not* help improve conditions for Bangladesh's impoverished workers. Demonstrated steps to afford internationally recognized worker rights—as the Government of Bangladesh would have to show to *gain back* full GSP benefits—would demonstrate to the world's brands *and* consumers that things have changed for the better. Regaining GSP status (with a U.S. seal of approval) could help Bangladesh's factories lure back brands and attract new customers—while continuation of the status quo is likely to see additional publicity sensitive brands abandon the country entirely (an outcome the AFL-CIO strongly opposes).

Moreover, it is the failure of the U.S. Government to act on the GSP petition that seems most likely to result in lost leverage.

When the U.S. fails to enforce its own laws, particularly when sufficient time—in this case about six years—has been granted, it only creates an atmosphere of impunity, not only for Bangladesh, but also for every other country receiving GSP benefits. The USTR is currently reviewing the labor rights practices of a number of countries, including Iraq, Georgia, Fiji, Uzbekistan, and the Philippines. What message will continued failure to act send to these Governments? If they believe that mere promises to change (rather than concrete, measurable improvements) are all that is necessary to continue to receive GSP benefits while pursuing a low-road strategy that hurts workers worldwide, it seems almost certain they will reduce their efforts to comply with the law. An atmosphere of impunity regarding labor rights may pad the profit margins of a few of the world's largest brands, but it certainly does nothing to increase shared prosperity.

On the other hand, action to suspend, limit, or withdraw GSP benefits for Bangladesh would send a different message—one that says that workers deserve more than lip-service; that progress is critical; and that the U.S. will indeed enforce its own laws. The GSP statute does not create a right to duty-free exports to the U.S. It establishes a privilege, one that must be earned through fair labor and trade practices. A reduction or loss of GSP benefits would provide an incentive to the Government of Bangladesh to make substantial changes to recover those benefits and restore a favorable image for brands and investment.

¹⁷ “Among Americans Who Know of Bangladesh Clothing Worker Deaths, Two in Five Less Likely To Purchase Clothes From There,” *Sacramento Bee*, Jun. 3, 2013, available at: <http://www.sacbee.com/2013/06/03/5465917/among-americans-who-know-of-bangladesh.html#storylink=cpy>.

Accomplishing such change in Bangladesh is possible. The AFL-CIO's sister organization the Solidarity Center has an office in Bangladesh, which has already been supporting worker-led unions in the garment sector and is poised to accomplish more if the Government of Bangladesh would become a partner in improving worker rights and acceptable conditions of work. We are also hopeful that the U.S. Government will increase its commitment to development programs in Bangladesh, including those that will help strengthen the labor rights regime and educate Bangladesh's workers and employers about democratic labor unions, worker rights, and acceptable conditions of work.

Moreover, there are several steps that the Government of Bangladesh can take right away to demonstrate that it is "taking steps to afford to workers in [Bangladesh] (including any designated zone in that country) internationally recognized worker rights" (as required by 19 U.S.C. § 2462(c)(7)). For instance, it can:

- drop all remaining charges against worker rights advocates Kalpona Akter and Babul Akhter (unless the cases move forward *immediately*)
- remove threats against the registration of the advocacy organizations BCWS & SAFE
- end police surveillance of union activists and labor NGOs
- provide to the U.S. Government—and make public—quarterly reports on the progress of the investigation into Aminul Islam's murder
- consistent with fundamental labor rights, eliminate any existing or proposed government approval for unions (including worker associations inside the EPZs) to affiliate with each other and allow all unions to link with outside organizations such as NGOs
- via rule or regulation, allow its Department of Labor to monitor union registrations and unfair labor practice complaints within the EPZs
- accept ILO and International Trade Union Confederation criticism and recommendations on the draft labor law amendments, including the recommendation to increase worker participation in the process¹⁸
- transfer, as quickly as possible, resources from the industrial police who act largely as agents of employers to inspection functions to investigate building and fire safety and investigate unfair labor practices

While not a complete list of the actions needed to secure internationally recognized worker rights in Bangladesh, this list illustrates that there are indeed many measurable changes the Government of Bangladesh could make right away to demonstrate that it is taking the required steps under the GSP statute.

The AFL-CIO wants a vibrant, productive garment industry in Bangladesh, in which workers have good jobs and owners make good returns on their investments. Both the Government of Bangladesh and international brands have obligations to ensure that they create an environment in which that can take place.

¹⁸ For more information on the shortcomings of the proposed labor law reform, see, e.g., Munima Sultana, "Labour Law Amendment Goes against Int'l Labour Standards," *The Financial Express*, May 30, 2013, available at: <http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/index.php?ref=MjBfMDVfMzBfMTNfMV85MF8xNzEwNDc=>.

V. Selected Rana Plaza Survivor Stories¹⁹

Anna Khatun, 16

Anna Khatun, 16, joined one of the factories in the Rana Plaza building four months ago as helper. She does not even know the factory name—just that she was working on the fifth floor.

“Because of poverty, I have sent my younger daughter to work and now she lost her right hand,” said her mother. A wall collapsed on Anna—and rescuers had to amputate her hand to free her from the rubble. Anna could not even respond when asked about what the future might hold.

“What will be her future? We don’t know. We only know she is disabled now,” said her mother.

Arati Bala Das, 18, New Wave Style, Ltd.

Arati Bala Das, 18, was pulled from the Rana Plaza wreckage after being pinned under a concrete block for three days. She and her mother, Titon Bala, worked at New Wave Style Ltd. Arati’s mother died in the disaster. Arati’s right leg had to be amputated to save her life.

Arati remembers a power outage hit immediately before the building collapsed. “When the building collapsed, I felt that I was going down. When it stopped, I found myself in the dark. It was difficult to breathe. I could not see anything. I could not move a bit. I realized that two dead bodies fell on my legs and a pillar had fallen on those dead bodies. I was very much afraid and I thought I would not be able to return alive. After few moments, I heard screaming workers, crying for help and I assumed that seven or eight more workers were there.” Rescuers, who found her after three hours, provided saline water to her through a tube until they could rescue her three days later.

Arati’s youngest sister, Akhi, 2, missed her mother. She would not stop crying and would not eat. The family brought her to the hospital so Arati could feed her. Arati has two more sisters—Lucky, 7, and Lovely, 12. Their father, Adhir Chandra Das, a poor day-laborer, lives with his family in a rented hut in Savar. Adhir is now left without the income of his wife and eldest daughter, which the family needs to survive.

Arati is afraid and sad. “I will never return to work at garment factory. I want the government to do something for us. I will not be able to work in future, at least the government can arrange artificial leg for me.”

Md. Pintu, 18, and Shilpi, 21, New Wave Bottom Ltd.

Md. Pintu, age 18, and his sister-in-law, Shilpi, 21, worked for three years as sewing machine operators in New Wave Bottom Ltd., on the second floor of the Rana Plaza building. They live in a small tin shed in Mazidpur Choto Goli, home to the majority of Rana Plaza workers.

¹⁹ As told to Solidarity Center staff in Bangladesh as of May 15, 2013.

Pintu and other workers noticed a big crack in the beam of the floor on April 23, 2013. Management discontinued production at 10 a.m. and instructed the workers to leave the building immediately. The next morning, Pintu and Shilpi discussed the crack with their family. They thought the factory would be closed for a few days for repairs, and they would have a safe place to re-start their machines. Unexpectedly, they heard a loudspeaker announcement: “All the workers of Rana Plaza, go to work. The factory has already been repaired.”

After hearing the announcement by a representative of the building’s owner, Pintu, Shilpi and other workers unwillingly went to work, deeply concerned and afraid. Before leaving the house, Shilpi looked at her 2-year-old son and sighed.

A few minutes after the workers arrived on the job, the electricity went out, the backup generators turned on and the building collapsed. Shilpi was rescued after a few hours and was sent to the nearest hospital, Prime Hospital. Then she was sent to Dhaka Medical Hospital for further treatment. She continued to lose blood and remained in serious condition. After eight days, she was transferred to the Apollo Hospital Ltd. for special care, but she died just after arriving at the hospital emergency room.

Pintu is still missing. His sister has waited outside the building with his picture, crying.