



The Honourable Excellency Ms. Saida Muna Tasneem
Bangladesh High Commissioner to the UK and Ireland
28 Queen's Gate, London SW7 5JA

30th October, 2023

Dear Honourable Ambassador,

On 1st November the Minimum Wage Board in Bangladesh is set to announce its decision on the new minimum wage rate for garment workers. Trade unions and labour organisations are calling for an increase to 23,000 taka per month, which is roughly £172. Bangladeshi garment workers urgently need this significant wage increase.

We, the undersigned, support calls to raise the Bangladesh minimum wage to 23,000 taka per month and call on the Bangladeshi Government and international fashion brands to support this increase.

Many brands have supported the move for greater building safety since the tragedy of Rana Plaza, but the wages workers are paid have remained low. The people that make our clothes deserve a wage they can live on.

Despite working in one of the largest and most important sectors in the country, the rising cost of basic food items means garment workers in Bangladesh are suffering from poor nutrition, as consuming things such as fish, meat and fruit have become luxuries they cannot afford. When things such as housing costs, medicine and basic bills are factored in, workers are struggling to survive.

In 2018 the minimum wage in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector was set at only 8,000 taka per month, even at the time this was considered below the amount needed to meet the basic cost of living. Since then, there has been severe inflation, pushing up the cost of basic goods while wages have remained stagnant. The result of this has meant the minimum wage has been a poverty wage.

Wages in Bangladesh lag behind other similar garment producing countries. Garment workers in China make the equivalent of 24,890 taka per month, in Malaysia it's 25,935 taka, and in the Philippines around 23,180 taka. Recently, the wage in Cambodia was set at 22,587 taka. Even in Vietnam, garment workers earn the equivalent of 15,660 taka, despite the size of Bangladesh's garment exporting industry far surpassing that of Vietnam.

The demands of the workers for a 23,000 taka minimum wage are justified. According to the Bangladesh Institute for Labour Studies (BILS), 33,368 taka is needed to cover the basic costs of living in Dhaka. The union demand for 23,000 taka is a bare minimum. Any wage below 23,000 will force workers to either work excessive overtime, continue taking out loans, or continue to compromise on their nutrition to be able to pay bills. It is also well-known that insufficient income forces garment workers to pull their children out of school and into work, therefore perpetuating child labour.

In its National Action Plan (NAP) on the Labour Sector of Bangladesh, the government of Bangladesh listed several actions to eliminate child labour in all its forms by 2025. Evidence points to a strong link between household poverty and child labour, and child labour perpetuates poverty across generations by keeping the children of the poor out of school and limiting their prospects for upward social mobility. In this regard, ILO Recommendation No. 146, which accompanies Convention No. 138 on Minimum Age, stresses that national policies should provide for poverty alleviation and the promotion of decent jobs for adults so that parents do not need to resort to child labour (art. 2b).

The Government of Bangladesh also committed alongside the ILO to a 'Roadmap on Labour', which includes a requirement to adopt an 'evidence-based wage policy' (4.4.1). This commitment to a balanced, evidence-driven methodology must give due consideration to the analysis and demands of trade unions, and align with the objectives outlined in the Road Map (2021-2026).

As we have clearly outlined above, and as I am sure you agree, the poor living conditions of the Bangladeshi garment workers and their families deserves serious attention. We respectfully ask you to pass on our concerns laid out above to your government, to set the new minimum wage in compliance with ILO standards, and with due consideration for the voices of trade unions and a commitment to evidence-based policy-making. We are also calling on you to safeguard workers and trade unions from any form of retaliation in the coming months, both during and after the minimum wage review.

With the wage board outcome just a few days away, we urge you and your government to support the needs of the people making our clothing in Bangladesh, and set the minimum wage at a liveable level. This is urgent and necessary.

Your sincerely,

No Sweat

Labour Behind the Label

War on Want

Remake

Stephen Russell, Senior International Officer, TUC

Mick Whelan, General Secretary, Aslef

Sarah Woolley, General Secretary, BFAWU

Dave Ward, General Secretary, CWU

Paul Fleming, General Secretary, Equity

Matt Wrack, General Secretary, FBU

Mark Serwotka, General Secretary, PCS

Steve Gillan, General Secretary, POA

Patrick Roach, General Secretary, NASUWT

Tim Rose, General Secretary, NGSU

Chris Kitchen, General Secretary, NUM

Mick Lynch, General Secretary, RMT

Roz Foyer, General Secretary, STUC

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Sharon Graham, General Secretary, Unite

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