

Recommendations for an Apparel Sector Response to the Crisis in Haiti

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Please note that these recommendations have been revised and refined in view of recent developments and new information.¹ Of most note, we have identified three concrete steps which we believe should be the immediate focus of coordinated action by MFA Forum participants.

Like you, our organizations – the International Textile, Garment, and Leather Workers' Federation, Maquila Solidarity Network, Solidarity Center, and Worker Rights Consortium – have been deeply saddened by the tragic loss of life and widespread destruction caused by the recent earthquake in Haiti. As organizations that have long worked with Haiti's garment workers and advocated for their rights and welfare, we are particularly concerned with both the immediate plight of these workers and their families, and the impact of this disaster on the future prospects of Haiti's apparel industry.

We have been heartened, not only by the tremendous outpouring of humanitarian assistance from across the globe to the Haitian people, but also, particularly, by contributions made by apparel companies to immediate disaster relief efforts and the coming together of stakeholders, through bodies like the MFA Forum, to collaborate on constructive responses to this crisis. We are sending you this communication to further that important effort and dialogue.

Because the apparel industry is the largest private sector employer in Haiti and the country's largest export earner, it is clear to us that providing meaningful aid to garment workers and ensuring the Haitian apparel industry's revival must be a central element of the relief and recovery process. In the immediate term, based on consultations with Haitian business and union representatives, we believe that relief programs carried out through apparel workplaces – which are among the country's few large and stable institutions functioning in the wake of earthquake – can fill a significant gap in efficiently reaching large numbers of individuals and families in need. In the longer term, Haiti's recovery and future development will depend on a basic commitment, by all stakeholders, to principles of respect for basic labor rights and provision of decent work.

The measures listed below are ones that our organizations are asking apparel buyers to support and help implement as part of a relief and development program centered on the Haitian apparel industry and its workers. These actions are complementary to the contributions to immediate humanitarian aid that many apparel companies and other stakeholder organizations are, to their credit, already undertaking.

In some cases, brands have already taken – of their own accord – very positive steps along the lines of the actions we recommend below. We would in particular note the important work being done by Gildan Activewear in providing baskets of food and other basic needs for employees at its contracted suppliers. We also note the donation of tents by Hanesbrands to the employees of its contractors.

We recognize that implementation of these measures will need to involve both multi-stakeholder bodies such as the MFA Forum, the ILO Better Work Program, and the IFC, and individual actors – apparel buyers, factory managers, trade unions, NGOs, and the governments of Haiti and key donor countries as well. While this implementation process will require dialogue and collaboration by all these parties, what is important at this point, from our perspective, is a commitment by apparel buying firms – whose orders are the Haitian apparel industry's lifeblood – to support these crucial measures to assist the country's garment factories and their workers in this time of crisis.

¹ This document has been revised by the following organizations: the Solidarity Center, Maquila Solidarity Network, and Worker Rights Consortium. Further revisions may be forthcoming pending new developments and information.

We look forward to further dialogue with you and to working together in support of the Haitian apparel industry and its workers.

Immediate Steps

As the most immediate priorities for collaborative action, MFA Forum participants should work together with suppliers and other stakeholders in Haiti to:

- A. Arrange for a safety inspection and certification of each factory to ensure that workers are not being exposed to further danger as a result of damage to building structures. As a condition of resuming or continuing production, each factory should be required to receive a formal certification of compliance with a recognized standard that is acceptable to buyers. A review of the outcomes of the inspection process should be circulated among stakeholders. In the case of those factories that do not pass the inspection, a plan should be developed (including budget and financing proposals) for changes required for their safe operation.
- B. Provide food baskets for workers and their families. This program should be modeled after the efforts already underway by Gildan Activewear, where baskets of food and other basic items are put together in the Dominican Republic and trucked into Haiti where they are distributed to workers at their worksites. Please see the attached overview proposal for a workplace distribution process.
- C. Establish a dedicated humanitarian relief fund for apparel workers to assist workers in providing for basic needs – particularly safe shelter – as they begin to rebuild their lives. Such a fund should be administered at apparel workplaces for each plant's employees.

These actions will require coordinated action by stakeholders, including buyers, suppliers, ILO Better Works, NGOs, and unions. We believe Business for Social Responsibility is well situated to play a coordinating and managing role for items B and C.

Additional Steps

I. At the Individual Factory Level, Apparel Buyers Should Assist and Encourage Factories to:

- A. In the case of factories that plan to reopen, or are operating already:
 - 1) Provide workers with at least one daily meal at the workplace and access to water for drinking and personal hygiene.
 - 2) Provide workers who have not been recalled yet with a source of income until they return to work.
 - 3) Provide priority in filling open positions to apparel workers who are not able to return to their previous places of work.
- B. In the case of factories seeking to reopen, but currently unable to do so, obtain credit needed for operational infrastructure (generators, etc), raw materials, and payroll.
- C. In the case of factories that will not be able to reopen or reemploy all their workers, provide displaced workers with legally-owed severance, outstanding wages, and any other mandatory terminal compensation.

- D. In the case of factories where workers have lost their lives or become permanently disabled because of the earthquake, provide compensation and assistance to the victims or their families.

II. At the Industry Level, Apparel Buyers, Themselves, Should:

- A. Support the creation of a database and outreach program for tracking the whereabouts and welfare of factory workers impacted by the earthquake in order to provide assistance and information about employment opportunities, and enable disbursement of relief funds, and/or compensation from employers.
- B. Where feasible, maintain production in Haiti, whether at existing or newly constructed supplier factories or by shifting orders to factory locations in Haiti that have not been impacted. Brands which may need to shift orders elsewhere should commit to returning to Haiti as soon as possible.
- C. Work with stakeholders to establish decent working conditions in their supply chains.
- D. Work with stakeholders to help develop a mechanism to prioritize employment opportunities for displaced workers in the remaining or new factories.
- E. Provide supplier factories with orders at volumes, prices and delivery dates that will enable these factories to operate and provide decent work to employees during the recovery process.

III. MFA Forum Network Participants, including Brands, Multilateral Institutions, Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives, NGOs, and Unions, Should:

- A. Support the channeling of new and existing relief efforts – including the distribution of tents, food, and other basic necessities – through programs at apparel workplaces, which are well placed to reach large numbers of workers and their families,
- B. Explore relief efforts tailored for worker populations and geared to facilitate employment, such as the creation of temporary housing centers for workers and their families and the provision of transportation to and from work.