

Joint Letter to Canadian companies re Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh

Sent Tuesday, December 17, 2013 to:

- **Canadian Tire Corporation**
- **Giant Tiger**
- **Hudson's Bay Company**
- **Sears Canada**
- **Walmart Canada**
- **Y.M. Inc.**

Copied to the Retail Council of Canada

On behalf of 25 human rights, trade union, women's, community, teacher, student, international development and faith organizations, we are writing to urge your company and other Canadian companies to join over 120 other apparel brands and retailers around the world in signing the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh.

We recognize that your company has chosen to participate in an alternative initiative known as the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, and that the Alliance and Accord have reached agreement on common safety standards. However, we are concerned that the Alliance's factory inspection program appears not to be independent and seems to be identical to the discredited model used by individual companies over the past decade that has failed to detect and eliminate hazardous conditions that have resulted in numerous preventable factory tragedies and the deaths of hundreds of workers.

We are particularly concerned that the Alliance does not offer workers and worker representatives an active role in the detection and remediation of hazardous working conditions. In contrast, under the Accord, worker representatives will have an active role in the delivery of health and safety training, and workers will be able to participate through democratically elected workplace health and safety committees and an anonymous complaint process, and by exercising their right to refuse unsafe work. If workers at Rana Plaza had had the right to refuse unsafe work, over 1,100 workers might still be alive today.

We are also concerned about the lack of transparency of the Alliance safety program. We understand that the findings from individual factory inspections and the status of corrective action in those facilities will not be shared with the public. In contrast, the Accord will make public the findings of all factory inspections and the corrective action plans agreed to by the factory. This level of transparency will provide an added incentive to factory owners to eliminate the hazards identified in a timely manner.

Lastly, we are concerned at the lack of commitment of Alliance member companies to provide concrete support for factory upgrades or for workers who lose income during the upgrading process. While the Alliance promises to provide low-cost loans to suppliers to make necessary upgrades, there is no requirement that Alliance member companies do so, nor is there any offer of financial support beyond loans that must be repaid. As well, there is no commitment to maintain orders with factories where improvements are being made. In contrast, the Accord program offers assurances to suppliers that

signatory companies will continue to place orders with suppliers at comparable order volumes during the first two years of the program, underwrite the cost of factory upgrades, and provide support to workers during the upgrade process.

In conclusion, we urge your company to make a genuine commitment to worker safety in Bangladesh by signing the Accord and joining a credible, independent, and transparent program that will help prevent future factory tragedies from taking place. By joining the Accord, your company will be contributing to sustainable development and social justice in Bangladesh. Our organizations and your customers are hoping you will take serious steps to eliminate workplace hazards that have caused the deaths and injuries of hundreds of workers in Bangladeshi supplier factories producing for the Canadian market.

We appreciate your consideration of our concerns and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Asia Pacific Working Group: Denis Côté and Kimberly MacMillan, Co-coordinators
Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID): Cindy Clark, Acting Co-Executive Director
BC Federation of Labour: Jim Sinclair, President
BC Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU): Darryl Walker, President
Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC): Julia Sanchez, President-CEO
Canadian Federation of Students (CFS): Jessica McCormick, National Chairperson
Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW): Denis Lemelin, President
Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE): Paul Moist, National President
Council of Canadians: Stuart Trew, Trade Campaigner
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO): Sam Hammond, President
Kairos: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives: Jennifer Henry, Executive Director
Maquila Solidarity Network: Lynda Yanz, Executive Director
Oxfam Canada: Robert Fox, Executive Director
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA): James Ryan, President
Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU): Warren (Smokey) Thomas, President
Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF): Paul Elliott, President
Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC): Robyn Benson, National President
South Asian Women's Rights Organization (SAWRO): Sultana Jahangir, Executive Director
Toronto and York Region Labour Council: John Cartwright, President
Unifor: Jerry Dias, National President
United Church of Canada: Michael Blair, Church in Mission Unit
United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW): Paul R. Meinema, President
United Steelworkers: Ken Neumann, National Director for Canada
Workers United: Barry Fowlie, Director
Workers' Action Center: Deena Ladd, Coordinator