

Call for support for the release of jailed Bangladeshi trade union leaders

Dear [l'en-tête de votre organisation],

We are writing this letter to you in support of UNI Global Union's campaign. UNI represents more than 20 million workers from over 900 trade unions in the fastest growing sectors in the world – skills and services. We call for your action to demand an immediate end to the persecution of garment workers, trade union leaders and worker activists in Bangladesh.

Since 21 December 2016, following a week of strikes and demonstrations by Bangladeshi garment workers seeking higher wages, the Bangladeshi authorities have arrested or detained at least 26 union leaders and worker rights advocates.

The events in December and the current climate of union oppression are an alarming step backwards for Bangladesh. Wages in Bangladesh' garment industry are among the lowest in the world, while the cost of housing, basic commodities and medical care is spiraling. The current minimum wage of 5,300 BDT (US\$67) per month hasn't been increased since 2013, while the cost of living for workers has increased significantly. The Bangladeshi government and garment factory owners are using the wage strike as a pretext to crack down on the labour movement. Employers responded to the strike by temporarily closing 59 factories and filing charges against hundreds of workers for their alleged participation in the strike. As many as 1,500 workers were dismissed and face being blacklisted. It is unacceptable that demands to increase the minimum wage are met with such draconian acts.

Nearly four years have passed since the collapse of the Rana Plaza building. While considerable progress has been made in the area of fire and building safety, primarily through the Accord, the Government of Bangladesh has done tragically little to guarantee the respect for the rule of law, including labour law and international labour standards. The evidence against the GOB is clear and compelling. It is still extremely difficult for workers to exercise their fundamental labour rights in Bangladesh and a severe climate of anti-union violence prevails.

The Bangladeshi government is very sensitive to its public reputation across the world since its economy is heavily dependent on the export of garments. External voices can be very powerful in delivering a strong message and bringing about change.

We are therefore calling on our Government to use its good offices to intervene urgently with the Government of Bangladesh to urge it to immediately release the jailed unionists and drop all criminal cases.

Yours sincerely