



11th Bangladesh Round Table on Social Compliance

- Synopsis -

Agenda of the 11th Round Table on Social Compliance,
held on 14 March at Dhaka has been titled:

“Strategies to reduce Fire Risks in the Bangladesh garments industries.”

Secretary of Ministry of Labour & Employment (MOLE) Mikail Shiper the Chief Guest said, “we can not ignore the responsibility for the recent fire incidents and loss of valuable lives in this largest industrial sector”.

The Round Table has been attended by government officials, suppliers, buyers, trade unions, activists, NGO’s and Diplomatic Missions. Among the speakers were Joint Secretary of MOLE, Director General of Fire Service and Civil Defence and their Director of Operation, BSCI secretariat in Brussels, Second Secretary European Union Delegation to Bangladesh, PVH, Ha-meem Group, Solidarity Center and GIZ among others.

Reasoning for this agenda had been the repeated devastating fire incidents in RMG sector (Tazreen and Smart Fashions) resulting in high number of lives and injuries raising the need to reassess the occupational safety measures at the garment factories. The incidents are a repeated wakeup call and needs for national and international attentions to limit and control these hazards risks. The quest had been on the table on how to contribute to the situation, whereby workers can feel secured enough and will benefit from the recent signed tripartite MoU to set up a National Plan on Fire Safety. Effective and appropriate Government response and its implementations as well as to involve workers’ representation and the international buyer were debated.

The Fire Service and Civil Defence Department headed by Brigadier General Ali Ahmed Kahn in Bangladesh summarised the importance to improve the fire fighting system, un-authorized buildings, ignoring of fire alarms and lack with the existing Fire Act including insufficient fire fighting drill and training, crowd control, missing of water reservoir and some narrow road conditions.

Dr. Wajed-ul Islam Khan from the BTUC pointed out that money can not compensate a loss of life. In his view the compliance situation deteriorated over the past years and fire fighting is not effective.

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Libuse Soukupova, Second Secretary of European Delegation to Bangladesh, referred on the Resolution on Bangladesh by the European Parliament (17th January 2013) and the Joint Statement by the EU High Representative and the Trade Commissioner (30 January 2013) calling for immediate actions to take measures to ensure the fire safety in Bangladesh. In particular to comply with international standards and the ILO Conventions. The EU is ready to assist Bangladesh in any way to implement those standards and that European and international companies need to do more to promote health & safety and implementation of international standards in the garment industry aligned with international guidelines on social and corporate responsibility. Calling for action by the private sector, the European resolution states to set up Health & Safety Committees involving workers at each factories and by establishing and independent inspection system. Furthermore should the stakeholders develop a voluntary label certifying that the products is manufactured in accordance to the ILO Core Labour Standards and that more international brands should incorporate with their subcontractors to improve health & safety standards.

The Secretary of the Ministry of Labour & Employment informed about the activities by the government forming 23 inspection teams and have visited over 1000 factories and the set up of a high power cabinet committee headed by his Ministry. The government promotes the development of an exclusive zone for all garment factories, a 'garment industrial park' in the area of Gazipur. He highlighted the Tripartite Statement of Commitment by government, the employers and the workers to develop the National Tripartite Plan of Action on Fire Safety. The draft Plan of Action is to be published soon. The National Health and Safety Council, founded under the Labour Code 2006, is working out a comprehensive Health & Safety Policy with specified responsibilities of the government and others. Government has declared the 27 December as the National Mourning Day in memory of the fire victims.

The Joint Secretary, Ministry of Labour & Employment, briefly outlined the draft National Action Plan formulated by the 13 members tripartite committee. The plan consists of 3 levels, - the legislative policy, - the Administration and - practical activities. The following skeleton is a draft and does not list the partnering agencies.



I. LEGISLATIVE POLICY		Executing Agency	Time bound
a)	Adoption of national occupational safety & health policy to be finalised by the Cabinet Committee.	Ministry of Labour & Employment (MOLE)	31 March 2013
b)	Review, and where necessary, adjustment of law, rules and legislation.	MOLE	30 June 2013
c)	Establishment of the task force for fire safety of the Cabinet committee for the RMG sector.	MOLE	31 March 2013
II. ADMINISTRATION		Executing Agency	Time bound
a)	Recruitment of staff to fill current vacant posts of Factory and Inspection Department.	MOLE	31 March 2013
b)	Implementation of the MOLE's project to strengthen the capacity of the Directorate of Labour Inspectors.	MOLE	31 December '14
c)	Review and where necessary adjust for factory licensing and certification procedures concerning fire safety including electric, chemical and environmental safety.	MOLE	30 June 2013
d)	Considering of the establishment of 'one stop shop' for the safety licensing and certifications.	MOLE	31 December '13
e)	Development to introduce a Unified Fire Safety Checklist to be used by all relevant government agencies.	MOLE	30 April, 2013
III. PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES		Executing Agency	Time bound
a)	Factory level fire safety need assessment	BGMEA and BKMEA	31 March 2013

Tripartite National Plan on Fire Safety (DRAFT)		Executing Agency	Time bound
b)	Development and Implementation of a Factory Fire Safety Improvement Program.	Ministry of Home Affairs and BGMEA	31 December '13
c)	Development of a transparent and accountable industry sub-contracting system.	MOLE	30 June 2013
d)	Delivery of Fire Safety Crash Course for mid-level factory management and supervisors.	Ministry of Home Affairs	30 June 2013
e)	Development and Delivery of Specific Training on fire safety for union leaders.	MOLE and Ministry of Home Affairs	31 December '13
f)	Development and Distribution of Mass Workers Education Tools.	MOLE	31 December '13
g)	Establishment of a Worker Fire Safety Hotline.	Ministry of Home Affairs	30 June 2013
h)	Development and Delivery of Specific Training on Fire Safety for the factory inspectors.	MOLE	30 June 2013
i)	Development of Guidelines for the Establishment of Labour Management Committees on Occupational Safety and Health on Fire Safety.	MOLE	30 June 2013
j)	Development and Dissemination of Self Assessment and Remediation Tools on Fire Safety.	MOLE and Ministry of Home Affairs	30 June 2013
k)	Development of a Tripartite Protocol for Compensation of the Families of Workers, who died and workers, who are injured as a result of occupational accidents and diseases.	MOLE	30 June 2013
l)	Establishment of a Public Discloser Website on Fire Safety in RMG factories.	BGMEA, BKMEA	30 June 2013

Md. Manjur Morshed, GIZ/Promotion of Social and Environmental Standards in the Industry (PSES) informed about the GSCP/GIZ 'Fire Alliance'. On 22nd of March on the initiative by the German ambassador, a round table will be held in Berlin to discuss with German and European brands on how to form an alliance on Fire Safety in Bangladesh and to support the National Plan.

GIZ is highly interested to support the Tripartite National Plan on Fire Safety, facilitated by ILO with the activities to implementing fire safety training, audit as well as facilitating the institutionalisation of the RMG industry.

In the debate prior to the tea break, speakers pointed out the risk of smaller factories producing as subcontractors, raising the question on who will monitor them while those are not member of any business association.

Alonzo Glenn Suson, Centre for international Solidarity, pointed out the low number of running trade unions in the industry. Out of 136 registered trade unions prior to 2008, only 10 are probably still in operation. However it is encouraging, that over the last 3 months 20 new local level trade unions had filed for registration and have got registered, expressing hope that this trend will continue having 3000 factories in this sector. Regarding the participation in the Tripartite National Plan a number of 45 registered and unregistered trade union federations are not part of the signatory TU structure and he was asking for a way that they could participate.

The presentation by PVH and Ha-meem Group after the tea break described how to minimize the fire risk and to participatory behave in times of fire incident. The fire insurer Sadaran Bima Corporation explained their fire risk assessment and how to determine the insurance policy.

When discussed about the reasons of not correctly addressing the fire risk among all factories, the necessary investment is still often purely regarded as a cost factor and not seen as an important investment. Participants also highlighted that the drive for improving fire safety shall come firsthand from the manufacturers themselves. However structural weakness has also been raised in the insufficient number of factory inspectors under the Ministry of Labour & Employment with limited incentives.

Following points have been stated by the participants as necessary to address by Government, the exporters' associations, the manufacturers' as well as the buyers':

1. Posting the "National Tripartite Plan of Action for Fire Safety in RMG Sector" on website.
2. Ensuring workers representation/opinion through trade unions in implementation of the policy.
3. All shall come under the one umbrella of the National Tripartite Plan to address the situation effectively and efficiently.

4. Develop a Garment Policy as fast as possible and to shift the factories out of congested area.
5. Invest in the Occupational Health & Safety of the workers.

Mr. Sultan form BILS addressed the floor echoing Ms. Farida Parveen’s utterance and urged that manufacturers need to change their mindset. Although Bangladesh is holding the 2nd position in RMG export worldwide but still mountains of challenge are in the way to achieve efficiency in this labour intensive industry. Government realistic planning, implementation, workers’ representation and compliant working conditions need immediate attention.

The session has been moderated jointly by Ziaur Rahman, Associate Professor of Dhaka University and by Christian von Mitzlaff, Round Table Organiser and the BSCI Bangladesh Representative. The Round Table is a social dialogue sponsored by BSCI and organized by LIFT Standards e.K.



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