



Fifth Bangladesh Round Table on Social Compliance, April 27, 2011

Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

Synopsis:

The Round Table was divided into two sessions: Opening session and Working session. It was attended by over 40 participants representing buyers, suppliers, labor unions and activists, NGOs, specialists and diplomatic missions. Members of Parliament were also present, including the chairmen of the Parliamentary Standing Committees on Commerce and Labour & Employment.

The opening session was chaired by organizer Christian von Mitzlaff. Journalist Farid Hossain moderated the RT. At the beginning von Mitzlaff proposed a minute of silence to pay respect to Lutful Hai, a member of parliament who died recently. Late Hai was a sincere supporter of the RT. Then the opening session was marked by brief remarks from some key participants. They were Zia Ahad (Phillips-Van Heusen), Debashish Kumar Saha (Fakir Apparels), Zafrul Hasan (Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal), Khairul Bashar (Hamim Group), Maren Boehm (Otto Group) and Asif Ayub (US Embassy).

Sarah Begum Kabori MP, Abul Qasem MP, chairman parliamentary standing committee on commerce ministry and Israfil Alam MP, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on labor and employment were among those who took part in discussions.

The speakers highlighted the need for keeping peace and harmony in the garment factories to help productivity. They also agreed that there should be structured channels of communication between the workers and employers, between workers and management of garment factories. The workers and employers talk to each other the more the confidence and trust. Such a atmosphere help increase productivity, said Maren Boehm from the Otto Group: "We all have the same goal: normalcy in the industry and increase productivity. Harmonizing and enhancing dialogue can be key to achieve this goal." Dialoguing between the workers and employers has been highlighted in the Round Table.

Stressing the need for dialoguing Zia Ahad from Phillip-Van Heusen said there is now a trust deficit between workers and employers. There should be a greater trust between workers and management. We should be able to create an in-house worker management platform to take control of the issues that come up.

Conveyor:



Organizer



In the RT two issues came up prominently: Trade Union and Participation Committee.

The labor unions and activists strongly favored allowing workers to do trade unions in according with the law and the rights provided by the country's constitution. However, representatives from suppliers and buyers felt that time may still may not be ripe for full-fledged trade union activities in factories. Many employers are still afraid of outside intervention that trade unions bring in.

However, there was consensus on one thing: the garment factories can form in-house participation committees which will have representatives elected by the workers to highlight the need and grievances of the workers to the management. The participation committees can also platform to the workers to build their negotiation capacity. It can also serve as a platform of training to workers in enhancing their negotiation capacity. It was agreed that the Participation Committee (which is provided by the Labor Law) should not be seen as a substitute to trade union, rather PC should be complementary to Trade Union activities.

The RT concluded with a concrete proposal to make the next practical step: There was a consensus that forming Participation Committee is a step forward in creating structured communication channel in factories. All participants raised hands in approval when the idea of launching a pilot project on Participation Committee in four or five factories was placed in the RT. More than half a dozen raised their hands to volunteer their participation in the pilot project. That was a concrete practical step approved unanimously in the RT.

Farid Hossain
Moderator
Bureau Chief, Associated Press