

NOTHING MORE, NOTHING LESS: A DEMAND FOR DIGNIFIED LIFE AND FAIR, MINIMUM WAGE

22nd November, 2023

GAATW and its members stand in solidarity with Bangladeshi garment workers who are protesting the new minimum wage proposed by the Labour Department, which is much lower than the rise in cost of living, and are demanding the immediate establishment of a living minimum wage of Tk 23,000 (USD 209). This is the minimum wage necessary for workers to be able to lead a dignified life, and is in line with the proposal of Asia Floor Wage Alliance Bangladesh, who submitted a review petition to the government-appointed wage board in Bangladesh on November 20th, demanding a thorough review of the newly proposed minimum wage¹. Similar support and demand for the Bangladeshi state authorities to reconsider their position has come from other global unions.

GAATW supports these demands and wishes to highlight that this is **not a standalone case but as part of a long global struggle** for decent work and living conditions. **We demand for fair minimum wage for all workers - nothing more, nothing less!**

We are concerned by the way in which these protests are being portrayed by some media outlets. This event should be **reported as garment workers demanding fair living wages** and not just asking for a wage hike. This is at the heels of what the workers faced during COVID-19 when in early 2020, international brands and buyers canceled \$1.44 billion worth of Bangladesh garment exports, a majority without compensation to the local suppliers². Nearly 1.2 million workers were let go without any compensation or severance package only to accrue more healthcare expenses as COVID-19 gained a foothold. Considering this volatility of the garment industry, the living wage is a necessary tool for workers to be able to live decently above the poverty line and be able to have the ability to save.

We are also concerned by reports of state-led intimidation and violence against protesting workers. As Nazma Akter, a trade union leader and founder of Awaj Foundation explains, *'demonstrators are being depicted as criminals, even though "small" rocks and brick chips are no match for rubber bullets and tear gas'*³. This use of force against protesters violates workers' right to collectively bargain and forecloses any opportunity for social dialogue.

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/AsiaFloorWage>

² Abandoned? The Impact of Covid-19 on Workers and Businesses at the Bottom of Global Garment Supply Chains. April 6, 2020. <https://www.workersrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Abandoned-Penn-State-WRC-Report-March-27-2020.pdf>

³ <https://sourcingjournal.com/topics/labor/bangladesh-minimum-wage-protests-four-deaths-bgmea-garment-workers-23000-tak-a-466250/?fbclid=IwAR0YBxKAOUbk4wINaafBn-vgBUN-bF86vUCVOdOS6wPtc-B5hknX4iVTFo>

This is also an issue that disproportionately impacts women as 60 percent of the ready-made garment (RMG) industry workers are women. **Women are confined in low wages jobs and are often forced to work overtime. This results in a double burden due lack of sleep, rest, nutrition and time poverty.**

Solidarity from other women workers of the Global majority is pouring from across the border in support of Bangladeshi workers' demand for higher minimum wages. Filipino Women Workers of the Kilusan ng Manggagawang Kababaihan (KMK)⁴ have expressed their support Bangladeshi workers' demand for higher wages and improved working conditions. Similar support has been voiced from garment workers and unions from Sri Lanka, states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh in India⁵, all of whom are battling similar historic struggles, but silos are cracking.

Joining the wave of international solidarity and demand for workers' rights, GAATW urges

1. The Government of Bangladesh to stop the state violence and respond to the workers' demands rather than portraying them as threats.
2. The Government of Bangladesh, the wage board and the BGMEA to institute the minimum living wage of Tk 23,000 for garment sector workers. This will set an example for other exporting industries and countries and respect workers' right to fair wage.
3. The international clothing brands to show their solidarity and adopt a rights-based approach instead of competing for the lowest price.
4. All the CSOs working for the rights of workers, irrespective of sector and immigration status, to continue to support this struggle by sharing information and expressing solidarity.

A message from Nazma Akhter, the founder and Executive Director of Awaj Foundation, a GAATW member in Bangladesh:

"The authorities are clamping down on workers the only way they know how: through violence. Workers are coming out in their thousands and that terrifies them. We are a powerful pack and collectively we are stronger than they think. Till Now four workers have been killed brutally from police fire & attack of local goons named Rasel, Imran, Anjuman & Jalaluddin. The women workers are the worst victims of brutality of police & local goons-apart from sexual harassment they suffered from all types of violence, they were beaten up, stick charged, been thrown rubber bullets & tear gas. Even the pregnant workers were not spared from the brutality. As the protest escalates, the death toll rises everyday along with thousands of severely injured workers. The workers are being arrested

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=734776688692302&set=a.665982878905017>

⁵ <https://fb.watch/ouwp4maaYW/>

everyday, rendered jobless, charged with legal cases and blacklisted. Sometimes the police in civil dress are roaming in the workers' area and they are threatening the workers to leave their areas.

The declared monthly minimum wage, 12500 Taka (USD 113) is not acceptable and its a mockery to the workers. They deserve a fair share of the wages and I am asking the Government and Prime Minister to reconsider the declared wage to 23000 Taka (USD 209). Hungry workers will not produce profit. The garment workers whose blood and sweat goes into making profit of the largest brands of the world, reports says that [93% of the brands don't pay the workers their living wage](#). The brand's fair purchasing practice will also be a key factor when it comes to ensuring working rights, freedom of association, freedom of movement and freedom of expression."

Other solidarity statements to read

Asia Floor Wage Alliance's statement: [Statement by the Garment Workers Alliance Supporting Bangladeshi Workers' Demand for a Minimum Wage of Tk 23,000](#)

IndustriALL Global Union's statement: [Unions in Bangladesh demand revision of new minimum wage](#)

APWLD' statement: [Hands off 11,000 Workers in Bangladesh. There are No Such Things as Illegal Strikes](#)

SIGNATORIES

1. Animus Association Foundation, Bulgaria
2. Fundación Libera, Chile
3. Corporación Espacios de Mujer, Colombia
4. Fundación Renacer, Colombia
5. ECPAT, Guatemala
6. Comité Permanente por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (CDH), Ecuador
7. Ibiss-co, Brazil
8. Association for Community Development (ACD), Bangladesh
9. MIST, France
10. FIZ, Switzerland
11. La Strada, Macedonia
12. Novi Put, Bosnia and Herzegovina
13. ASTRA – Antitrafficking Action, Serbia
14. Ban Ying, Germany
15. Legal Support for Children and Women (LSCW), Cambodia
16. La Strada International
17. La Strada, Ukraine
18. European Sex Worker Rights Alliance - ESWA
19. Pakistan Rural Workers Social Welfare Organization (PRWSWO), Pakistan
20. National Workers Welfare Trust, India

21. Telangana Domestic Workers Union, India
22. Andhra Domestic Workers Union, India
23. Just Economy and Labor Institute (JELI), Thailand
24. Brigada Callejera de Apoyo a la Mujer, E.M. A.C, México
25. AMKAS, Nepal
26. Rights Jessore, Bangladesh
27. FairWork, The Netherlands
28. La Strada, Moldova
29. GAATW, Canada
30. Public Union "Clean World " Aid to Women (PUCW), Azerbaijan
31. Serra-Schönthal Foundation, Spain
32. Comitato per i Diritti Civili delle Prostitute APS, Italy
33. Human Resource Development Foundation, Turkiye
34. Bangladesh Nari Sramik Kendra (BNSK), Bangladesh