



September 17, 2024

Dr. Mohammad Yunus
Chief Advisor
Interim Government
People's Republic of Bangladesh

Subject: Promoting Bangladesh Garment, Footwear, Travel Goods Industry by Improving Labor Rights in Bangladesh

Dear Dr. Yunus,

The members of the American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA) and the Fair Labor Association (FLA) include hundreds of American, European, and Canadian buyers. We congratulate you on your new transitional role. We appreciate your comments both in support of the garment, footwear, and travel goods industry, and in support of the workers who are the backbone of that industry. In particular, your comment that Bangladesh should reform local labor laws to align with ILO standards is very welcome. As you shepherd Bangladesh through this transition and into a new era, we look forward to working closely with you to ensure that both the protection of workers' rights and growth of the industry are paramount.

We fully recognize the important place that Bangladesh holds as the third largest supplier of garments as well as a fast-growing supplier of footwear and travel goods. The favorable trade partnerships and spirit of collaboration that underpin these markets has brought shared prosperity and economic growth. And we know that these partnerships can go much further – if we continue to build on our mutual respect for, and support of, worker rights.

As such, we urge the interim government during this transition to take critical and long-lasting steps towards furthering worker rights, including:

- 1) We urge the interim government to immediately release those who remain under arrest from the Fall 2023 protests over the minimum wage, including the removal of all criminal charges against those arrested during the Fall 2023 protests over the minimum wage. We further urge the interim government to end the threat of arrest for thousands more workers related to the Fall 2023 minimum wage protests by immediately canceling the "First Information Reports" related to those workers. We also call on the interim government to drop and resolve criminal charges brought against labor organizers, such as Babul Akhter, the General Secretary of Bangladesh Garments and Industrial Workers Federation and Jewel Miya, a labor organizer with the Bangladesh Independent Garment Workers Union Federation, who were both arrested in 2023 for advocating for higher wages.

- 2) We renew our longstanding recommendation that the interim government move swiftly this year to a transparent and regular annual minimum wage review mechanism for the garment, footwear, and travel goods industries, with all stakeholders – employers, the government, and workers (independent unions, worker groups/representatives) – at the table. A transparent, annual minimum wage review that fully includes all stakeholders, versus the current five-year review, enables the government to better respond to current economic circumstances without imposing sudden, huge burdens on the industry or workers. The implementation of a regular and transparent wage review mechanism would promote both the short- and long-term health and stability of the Bangladeshi garment, footwear, and travel goods industry. We also encourage the government to consider giving guidance to employers to pay missed wages to workers for the four days missed during the declared holiday.

- 3) To promote harmonious industrial relations and prevent future unrest, we urge the interim government to quickly restart tripartite discussions on the Bangladesh Labor Act and bring the law into line with international labor standards. Those reforms should simplify the creation and registration of independent trade unions, including a significant reduction of the registration threshold. We also urge the government to increase penalties for unfair labor practices and extend full labor rights to workers in the Export Processing Zones (EPZ).

Thank you for your attention to these important matters. We believe improving worker rights goes hand in glove with promoting a successful Bangladesh garment, footwear, and travel goods industry now and in the years to come. We look forward to being your partner through this transition in promoting the growth of the Bangladesh garment, footwear, and travel goods industry by improving worker rights.

Sincerely,



Steve Lamar
President & CEO
American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA)



Jeff Vockrodt
President and CEO
Fair Labor Association (FLA)