

Why the Accord will be here until 2021

In reaction to recent statements concerning the future of the Bangladesh Accord, the Witness Signatories to the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh—Clean Clothes Campaign, International Labor Rights Forum, Maquila Solidarity Network, and the Worker Rights Consortium—wish to respond regarding the continuation of the Accord's inspection programme. Recent statements have led some to erroneously believe that the Accord is scheduled to end in 2018, and one should ask whether such an early departure is even desirable given the limited progress made in the development of a credible and functioning national safety regulatory body.

BEN VANPEPERSTRAETE, JUDY GEARHART, LYNDA YANZ and SCOTT NOVA

IN the wake of the Rana Plaza building collapse—the deadliest disaster in the history of the global garment industry, in which 1,134 workers were killed—three initiatives were launched with the purpose of averting further industry tragedies in Bangladesh: the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh (Accord), the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety (Alliance), and the National Action Plan on Fire Safety and Structural Integrity (NAP).

The Accord is an agreement reached between over 200 apparel companies, eight Bangladeshi union federations, and two global unions. This unprecedented safety agreement is based on legally-binding commitments by apparel brands to ensure that hazards in their factories are identified and corrected. The Accord has overseen factory renovations—from installation of fire doors to strengthening of dangerously weak structural columns and beams—that have already improved safety for over two million garment workers. This success can be attributed to the Accord's distinct approach, which combines independent safety inspections with multi-brand leverage, financial support and legal accountability to ensure that problems are not only identified but are fixed.

In comparison, the Alliance and the NAP are smaller, less transparent, non-binding programmes that do not benefit from the same level of brands' commitment to change, especially when it comes to financial feasibility.

To ensure that the safety improvements achieved under the Accord are maintained and expanded, brand and union signatories of the Accord announced in June of 2017 that the Accord has been extended for three years, until May of 2021. To date, 48 companies, including H&M, Inditex (Zara), Primark, and PVH (Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein), have signed the new Accord, with many more likely to follow in the months ahead. These signatories represent many of the largest brands and retailers in the world and most of the Bangladesh RMG sector's key customers. Their combined commitment means that the

2013 Accord successor agreement will cover at least 1,400 factories and a majority of all export garment production.

The purpose of the renewed Accord, which takes effect in May of 2018 when the current 2013 Accord expires, is to ensure that factories made safe under the Accord remain safe. At the same time, the new Accord will support improvements to Bangladesh's public regulatory regime, in order to strengthen and pass on this responsibility to the Bangladesh government at the end of those three years. As was agreed to in meetings on October 19

safe working conditions for the country's four million garment workers.

For example, the Accord's robust inspections and the commitments made by the participating brands have enabled the Accord to achieve a high remediation rate, such that 79 percent of the safety issues identified by the Accord engineers in the past four years have been fixed, in many cases with some form of financial support from the company signatories. By contrast, the government of Bangladesh's own National Action Plan (NAP) has achieved a

work, the government will have to not only solve the problem of slow progress at the NAP factories, but also demonstrate the capacity to take on regulatory responsibility for all of the factories now covered by the Accord. There is also a large gap on transparency: currently, the Corrective Action Plans for the factories covered by the NAP are not even published on the DIFE website.

The Transition Accord will have to be reassured that the Government of Bangladesh meets reasonable criteria to take over programme activities. Until then it will

potential to ensure the government of Bangladesh is fully prepared to assume its proper role in regulating fire and building safety to protect all workers in the RMG industry. At the same time, it is important to understand that factory inspection and remediation coordination are not the only purposes of the Accord. The agreement's power derives from the fact that it creates obligations for buyers, not just factories, including the obligation to ensure that factories have sufficient financial resources to cover remediation costs. Implicit in the Accord is also the expectation that Accord signatories are committed to continue producing in Bangladesh. Without the Accord, many buyers would have had no choice but to leave Bangladesh after the Rana Plaza collapse. Instead, with the Accord in place to provide assurances on safety, the buyers have stayed.

Ultimately, any final compliance system will need to hold both ends of the supply chain—factories and brands—responsible for its implementation. While we hope all factories in Bangladesh will eventually be covered by a single institution, international brands will always need to take responsibility in ensuring any such institution is effective. To that end, we are fully encouraging all brands to sign on to 2018 Accord, or the Transition Accord, through to May 2021, which will ensure adequate time for this transition to take place smoothly.

2018 Accord represents a tremendous opportunity for all involved. It enables the buyers to support and sustain improvements in the RMG industry, it gives the government of Bangladesh time and support to create a regulatory apparatus fully capable of ensuring building safety, and it provides factory owners with global recognition of their commitment to build a safe industry.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the position of *The Daily Star*.

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FILE PHOTO

between brand and trade union signatories to the Accord, the BGMEA, and the Bangladesh Ministers of Commerce and Labour, the Accord will continue this work until the local regulatory bodies meet a set of rigorous readiness conditions.

It remains to be seen how long this transition will take; however, any objective assessment of the government's current state of readiness will conclude that there is a lot of work to do. In order for the Accord to conclude its operations, local mechanisms must be developed, put in place, and demonstrably running smoothly to ensure

remediation rate of only 20 percent during the same period at the factories for which it is responsible. It is clear that brands' commitment to the remediation process is a critical factor to the Accord's success.

It is unrealistic to imagine that the NAP, or its successor, the Remediation Coordination Cell (RCC), will be able to bring this vast amount of unfinished work to completion over the next twelve months, particularly not until additional agreements are put in place to ensure brand support for remediation. Moreover, in order to create conditions that would allow for the Accord to wrap up its

continue to operate in Bangladesh, meeting with the Bangladesh government and the BGMEA leadership every six months to review and assess the preparedness of national regulatory bodies. The Accord cannot exit Bangladesh until all parties agree that the government is ready to take over these responsibilities. To exit prematurely would be disastrous: it would expose workers to renewed risk of injury and death and it would gravely undermine buyer confidence in Bangladesh.

We very much welcome the upcoming transition phase of the Accord, which has the

MODERN SLAVERY AND CHILD LABOUR

Asia's unacceptable record

Sixty-two percent of the victims of modern slavery and 40 percent of the child labourers around the world are in Asia and the Pacific. Unacceptable forms of work call for unprecedented measures to combat them, as governments, employers' and workers' representatives from 193 countries discuss, this week, ways to accelerate the eradication of child labour worldwide at the IV Global Conference on the Sustained Eradication of Child Labour.



OUT of the 40 million victims of modern slavery worldwide, almost two thirds—25 million people—are exploited in Asia and the Pacific. Making the region host to the largest number of victims of modern slavery today.

Further breakdowns of the modern slavery figure reveal that the region accounts for 73 percent of all victims of forced sexual exploitation, 68 percent of those subjected to state-imposed forced labour, and 64 percent of those in forced labour exploitation.

And although the share of persons living in extreme poverty in Asia and the Pacific has been cut by about 70 percent over the past 10 years, 62 million children still must work so that they and their families can survive.

Fighting these unacceptable forms of work is part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by world leaders in 2015. An agenda whereby all countries committed to achieve 17 interrelated goals and 169 associated targets to guide global development, which are collectively known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Target 8.7 calls for "immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern



A boy working at an aluminium goods factory in Dhaka. Sixty-two million children in the Asia Pacific still work so they and their families can survive.

PHOTO: AFP

slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour."

The latest figures show that the SDGs, particularly target 8.7, will not be achieved unless efforts are dramatically increased. Ending modern slavery and child labour requires integrated thinking, coordinated action, effective policymaking and efficient use of resources in unprecedented ways.

Policies beyond the world of work must converge around this goal, to address the root causes of forced labour, modern slavery and child labour, and find the right incentives and deterrents to change behaviours.

A coherent strategy will include policies that touch upon fundamental rights of workers, education, social protection, labour inspection, informality, youth employment, gender, migration and labour law, while also

strengthening our knowledge base through statistics and research.

Achieving SDG 8.7 will require mobilising partnerships at a new level. Partnerships that harness energy, resources and strategic vision. And that's what Alliance 8.7 is about: A multi-stakeholder initiative, conducting research and sharing knowledge, driving innovation, and leveraging resources to accelerate efforts to achieve the target.

This objective requires the active involvement of all parts of society, of all of us: governments, workers' and employers' organisations, private sector, civil society and community organisations, faith-based groups, academia, media and individuals.

There are already some encouraging signs, especially in Asia which has seen the largest decline in child labour since 2012. This progress was accomplished by moving away from isolated approaches, towards policies that tackle the root causes of child labour, while strengthening countries' legal frameworks and capacities for enforcement.

Let's continue the momentum and ask ourselves and each other: What more is needed to ensure there's no one left behind in our own countries and communities, in our businesses, schools, and homes?

If not us, who else?

Tomoko Nishimoto is ILO Assistant Director-General.

A WORD

A DAY

ECOMIUM
NOUN

A speech or piece of writing that praises someone or something highly

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

28 Massage

29 Broadway show

33 Clock numeral

34 Posh

35 Ritzy home

37 Foreboding sign

38 More profound

39 Uncool fellow

40 Attire

41 Drunkards

DOWN

1 Surgery reminders

2 Accept eagerly

3 Dancer Castle

4 Acapulco natives

5 Business combine

6 Bye, in Baja

7 Scepter

8 Massachusetts town

9 Cultivating

12 Placid

16 Aswan's river

21 Dictionaries

22 Did restaurant work

23 Went to sea

24 Satellite

25 Physics amount

27 Apartment workers

29 Trumpet accessories

30 Unbilled role

31 Watchful

32 Gives for a bit

36 Gorilla, for one

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

STILTS SHAD
AURORA TELE
SLOWED EXAM
HINTS MIAMI
APSE TANGOS
COOL CODE
JOHNWAYNE
DAN ENYA
OMEGAS CAST
EASEL THROW
SITE SATORI
ICES APENORI
NAPE CEDARS

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

FLAP! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

7-10

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

WE LIKE TO TAILOR OUR TREATMENTS TO OUR CLIENTS' LIFESTYLES. WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF?

WELL, LET'S SEE...

...WE HAVE THREE KIDS UNDER TEN, AND WE DON'T GET MUCH SLEEP, EXERCISE OR FREE TIME.

TODAY ONLY 1/2 PRICE MASSAGE

THEY SAID SALVAGE WORK IS EXTRA.