

Pakistan & Bangladesh: 'Stop factories from becoming slaughterhouses of workers '

Karachi workers stage rally to express solidarity with Baldia, Dhaka garment factories martyrs

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Karachi, May 24: The governments and International Brands are directly responsible for the gory incidents in Ali Enterprises Baldia Karachi and garment factories of Dhaka, Bangladesh, as their criminal negligence resulted in loss of lives of thousands of innocent workers. Strict steps should be taken to ensure proper safety of workers and stop turning the factories into slaughterhouses of workers.

This was said by labor leaders, addressing a large rally in front of Karachi Press Club (KPC) here Friday, staged by National Trade Unions Federation Pakistan (NTUFP) to express solidarity with the martyrs of garment workers of Bangladesh.

They said to avoid repetition of Karachi and Dhaka tragedies it is necessary that local and international labor laws be strictly applied in all textile and garment factories. The international industrial safety standards for labor should be implemented to save the lives of workers.

A large number of workers, trade union activists, political leaders, representatives of human rights organizations, intellectuals and students attended the rally. Carrying banners and placards they chanted slogans demanding safety measures for the factory workers.

The speakers said millions of Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers are related to textile and garment industries; however, in both countries these workers are even deprived of the rights guaranteed to them under the local constitutions and labor laws. They said working conditions for these labors are very poor and they have to work 12 to 14 hours a day. They said hardly 3percent of these workers are registered with social security institutions. In their factories trade unions and collective bargaining agents are virtually non-existent. Many big factories, working for decades, have not even bothered to get themselves registered.

They said due to the pressure of influential industrialists, the process of labor inspection is put on the back burner. Resultantly, the number of industrial accidents has risen sharply. Three major human tragedies in such factories in short span of eight months have diverted the world attention to this sensitive issue. These incidents started with a huge fire in Ali Enterprises, Balida Karachi, burning alive more than 300 garment workers. Then in November 2012 more than 150 workers perished in fire in a Dhaka factory and recently more than 1200 workers died in collapse of a building in Dhaka, housing garments factories. All these incidents took place in the garment factories that make garments for renowned international brands. These international brands in order to maximize their profits through the use of cheap labor are violating all local and international laws.

They said it is a misfortune that in the 21st century after death of thousands of workers in these industrial accidents a discussion on the basic rights of workers has started. They said it is inevitable that the local and international labor laws should be implemented in consultation with the labor

unions and workers' organizations, and all international brands be made bound not to begin production till ensuring adherence to local and international labour standards and laws.

Paying glowing tributes to these martyrs, the speakers said their sacrifices would give a new spur to the international workers movement, and the repetition of these incidents would not be allowed. They welcomed the agreements between international brands and labor organizations especially "IndustriALL Global Union" after the Dhaka incidents and demanded that the sphere of these agreements should be extended to Pakistan and other countries. They demanded to give legal cover to these agreements and make bound the international brands to follow them. They criticized some international brands like Wal-Mart and GAP who have opposed these pacts and termed it anti-labor attitude.

The rally demanded adequate safety measures in all industries and factories. The use of social audit institute certification and code of conduct as substitute to labor laws should be declared illegal. The bereaved families of victims of Ali Enterprises Karachi and Rana Plaza Dhaka should be given compensation as per demands of the labor unions. The process of labor inspection should be revived and made further effective. All factories should be registered as per laws. All workers should be given appointment letters and social security cards. Labors should be given their rights of trade union and collective bargaining agent. The minimum wages should be fixed at Rs20000 per month. All international brands should be made bound to follow international labor standard.

Those spoke the rally include NTUF president Muhammad Rafiq Baloch, general secretary Ghani Zaman Awan, deputy general secretary Nasir Mansoor, labor leader Usman Baloch, Gul Rehman of Workers Rights Movement, Riaz Abbasi of Atlas Battery, NTUF Balochistan president Allah Warraya Lassi, president of Gadani Ship Breaking Labor Union Bashir Ahmed Mahmoodani, Ghulam Muhammad of Landhi Action Committee, Muhammad Aslam of Kohinoor Employees Union, president Al-Ettehad Power Looms Workers Union Abdul Muhammad, Shaikh Majeed of PIA, Muhammad Mubeen of Mactor Pharma, Razaq Kachelo, Rashid Abbasi and others

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