

Brands including Ikea shun new Bangladesh factory safety accord introduced after Rana Plaza disaster

The Bangladesh government wants to reduce factory safety monitoring by foreign initiatives but has failed to build a strong and credible national factory inspectorate

Monday 11 June 2018, by [SAFI Michael](#) (Date first published: 6 June 2018).

New pact follows Bangladesh Accord, a safety agreement supported by buyers in the garment sector, established after the Rana Plaza collapse killed more than 1,000 workers

American retailer Abercrombie and Fitch, Swedish furniture giant Ikea and the clothing label of rapper Sean “Diddy” Combs are among the brands yet to sign a new accord to uphold the safety of millions of garment workers in [Bangladesh](#).

The pact follows on from the Bangladesh Accord, the largest of the safety agreements signed between brands and unions five years ago after 1,134 garment industry workers were killed in the collapse of the [Rana Plaza building](#) on the outskirts of Dhaka.

The accord expired on Thursday, and another similar agreement, the Alliance for Worker Safety, will run out at the end of the year. Under both, factory owners were made to improve the structural and fire safety of their buildings in order to keep supplying to major western brands.

So far about 176 of the 220 companies in the Accord have signed its extension including H&M, Zara and Primark. But the shortfall means about 250 factories supplying to western brands would no longer be monitored under the scheme, according to Rob Wayss, the executive director of the Accord.

They include factories supplying to Abercrombie and Fitch, the British retailer Edinburgh Wool Mills and Sean Comb’s label Sean John. Abercrombie did not respond to questions. Edinburgh Wool Mills has been contacted and Sean John could not be reached.

Campaigners have also called on [Ikea](#) to sign up to the new accord which, unlike its predecessor, is also open to non-garment companies producing textiles in Bangladesh.

Ikea told the Guardian it shared the objectives of the accord but preferred to work under its existing company-wide code of conduct called IWAY. The code is considered rigorous but does not make suppliers or the findings of inspections public.

Worker fatalities have fallen dramatically and more than 100,000 identified safety issues have been resolved in the past five years under the accord and alliance. But their expiration this year signals a new, more uncertain phase for efforts to improve conditions in Bangladesh’s garment factories.

The new accord is being challenged by disgruntled factory owners in the Bangladesh high court,

which has allowed the extended scheme to operate until December while it hears the case.

The alliance, which oversees factories supplying to brands including Gap and Walmart, is still negotiating about whether it can continue its work after it expires this year.

Both the Bangladesh government and peak bodies for the powerful garment industry have said they want the international agreements scrapped as soon as possible, insisting Bangladesh is ready to monitor safety itself.

“The validity of accord and alliance will not be extended after due time. Bangladesh no longer needs these two organisations,” the country’s commerce minister, Tofail Ahmed, [said last week](#). “Their validity will not be extended for due reasons. Activities of such organisations no longer belong in the world.”

Factories inspected by the Bangladesh government have shown significantly less progress towards alleviating safety issues than those overseen by the Accord and Alliance. As at February, less than 15% had fixed even half their outstanding dangers, according to [the International Labour Organisation](#).

International scrutiny is also dwindling. This year is the first since 2013 that Bangladesh has not been singled out for examination by the ILO at its annual standards conference in Geneva this week.

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