

Sri Lanka: Local apparel companies oppressing FTZ workers?

Friday 23 September 2022, by [RATHNAYAKE Dinitha](#) (Date first published: 23 September 2022).

A workers' rights group has alleged local apparel companies in the free trade zones (FTZs) are mistreating workers by forcing them to work extra hours and reducing allowances and bonuses, while the apparel sector employers have denied these allegations and claimed that the welfare of all workers has been ensured.

Speaking to *The Morning* this week workers' rights group "Stand Up Movement Lanka" alleged that apparel companies have been threatening workers with the loss of employment by moving their manufacturing and production plants and operations overseas, forcing them to work extra hours by giving them unachievable targets, and also reducing allowances and bonuses provided for food, transport, attendance, and to mitigate the economic crisis.

Stand Up Movement Lanka Executive Director Ashila Dandeniya told *The Morning* that these companies also reduced the food, transport, and crisis allowances, and attendance bonus.

"Most of the workers have no time to have food or to go to the washroom due to these unachievable targets and they are facing a lot of difficulties. This is not the human way of making people work. Normally, we do see around 10,000-15,000 vacancies per day in every factory, which is not there anymore. New recruitments are zero at the moment and more than 5,000 manpower workers have lost their jobs."

She also said that most of the FTZ workers are giving up their jobs and hoping to migrate at the moment.

Responding to these claims, the Joint Apparel Association Forum (JAAF) said that it is unfortunate that various interested parties make these statements without backing them up with quantifiable facts.

"We presume that these unsubstantiated allegations are against the apparel industry, as it is the sector with the largest employment".

JAAF Secretary General Yohan Lawrence, speaking to *The Morning*, said that whilst there is a global fall in the orders, which affects not just Sri Lanka but all apparel manufacturing countries, there is active hiring to meet current orders, as the industry requires employees with a range of skills.

"Several factories pay workers an additional cost of living allowance to help them navigate price hikes and shortages. They try to keep up with the inflation, but several factors including the rising cost of fuel are beyond the industry's control. Meanwhile, factory managements are providing and absorbing the considerably higher costs of both meals and transportation as a value addition to the employees.

"This is despite costs having increased considerably, given the galloping inflation. Worker welfare is

an embedded principle in the way we work. Many factories, while not just providing nutritious meals for employees, also give two or three additional packs of food per employee in order to alleviate the economic burdens on these families. A number of manufacturing plants have begun providing emergency packs of essential rations to employees.

“Additionally, most plants operate their own medical clinics free of charge for employees, including the provision of medicines. Plants also run welfare shops which allow employees to buy basic provisions at discounted rates. While these may not fulfil an employee’s complete requirements, the management does the maximum possible to provide additional relief to their employees at all levels. This crisis affects all of us. The JAAF membership is acutely conscious of this fact. We would not be the force we are in the global apparel supply chain, if companies neglect to take care of their workers.”

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The Morning

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