



September 1, 2010

His Excellency Mr. Akramul Qader
Ambassador of Bangladesh to the United States
Embassy of Bangladesh
3510 International Drive NW
Washington, DC 20008, USA
Fax: (202) 244-2771

Dear Ambassador Qader,

I am writing on behalf of the American Apparel & Footwear Association (“AAFA”), the national association of the apparel and footwear industries. Our members produce and market apparel and footwear throughout the United States and the world. In short, our members make everywhere and sell everywhere, including Bangladesh.

Our members’ main currency with consumers is the reputation of our brands. While quality, style and value do play vital roles in selling clothes and shoes to our customers around the world, it is the reputation of our members’ brands – and what those brands represent to consumers – that truly enable our members to sell clothes and shoes.

At the same time, because the footwear and apparel industries are so labor-intensive, we are usually the first non-agricultural industries to be established in most developing countries. Consequently, our members feel that we have a responsibility to the lives of those that we touch in these countries. The employment in our sector provides new economic opportunities in these countries where none previously existed.

As a result, our member companies are fully engaged in ensuring that the apparel and footwear we produce are manufactured under lawful, humane and ethical conditions. Our association’s mission statement, developed in 2001, reinforces this strong commitment by stating that the American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA) should focus on “Ensuring that individuals employed in the sewn products industries are afforded opportunities, and are treated with fairness and respect.”

As such, I write to express our grave concern about recent events in Bangladesh, particularly with regards to repeated news reports of police and government repression of workers in various Ready Made Garment (RMG) factories around the country. The reports stem from ongoing protests by some workers against the

proposed wage increase the government announced July 29th. This repression has reportedly included arrests, intimidation, harassment and other measures that cause serious apprehension among our members, many of whom are major buyers and producers of garments from Bangladesh.

We hope the government will respect the rule of law and follow a peaceful approach in responding to these ongoing protests. More importantly, we urge the government to constructively engage all stakeholders – workers, producers and buyers – in order to resolve the RMG wage issue as soon as possible. We are seeking your leadership in establishing the appropriate, peaceful and respectful dialogue among all stakeholders to make this resolution a reality.

In this light, we also remain concerned regarding the ongoing case involving the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS). Civil society groups, like the BCWS, play an important role in meeting our goal of “Ensuring that individuals employed in the sewn products industries are afforded opportunities, and are treated with fairness and respect.” Applying the rule of law to and guaranteeing the freedom of association based on an individual’s decision without undue pressure is critical for all.

We have grave concerns with regard to the reports that BCWS’s registration to operate was cancelled by the Bangladesh government on June 3 and that BCWS has been informed its property and funds will be confiscated. Further, we understand that the Bangladesh government issued arrest warrants for many BCWS staff in early August. If the reports are true, the actions seemed to be without merit.

Second, we have received reports that one or more BCWS staff were detained and possibly subjected to violence by Bangladesh authorities. Again, if true, this is unacceptable.

The circumstances surrounding the removal of BCWS’ license and the seizing of its assets remain, at best, unclear and lack transparency. Further, the government’s justification for the arrest of BCWS staff and the issuing of arrest warrants for other BCWS staff are, at best, equally non-transparent and also appear to be without merit.

We urge the government to be transparent and open to a thorough and complete investigation into the issue and provide a full, and public, explanation of the circumstances as soon as possible. If, as we believe, the Bangladesh government finds that the removal of BCWS’ license, the seizing of BCWS assets and the arrests of BCWS staff were not prosecuted in accordance with the law, the Bangladesh government should remedy the situation immediately.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter. We look forward to continuing our long-term and mutually beneficial relationship with Bangladesh.

Please contact Nate Herman of my staff at 703-797-9062 or by e-mail at nherman@apparelandfootwear.org if you have any questions or would like additional information.

Please accept my best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin M. Burke". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "K".

Kevin M. Burke
President & CEO

CC:

- Mr. Abdus Salam Murshedy, President, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA)
- Mr. A.K.M. Salim Osman, President, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA)
- Shabbir Ahmed Chowdhury, Chairman, U.S. Bangladesh Advisory Council (USBAC)