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## 🇬🇧 Triumph over tragedy: reimagining Bangladesh's ready-made garment industry

Ellen Tauscher, Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety [Author alerts](#) Jun 18 14:03 Comment



Last year, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced that her vision for the Bangladesh ready-made garment (RMG) sector was to reach \$50bn in exports by 2021. It is an important and ambitious goal for a nation that has worked hard to develop a brighter economic future. With the RMG sector accounting for 81 per cent of Bangladesh's overall exports, reaching such a milestone could help the nation substantially reduce poverty and strengthen economic outcomes for millions of people.

Transforming industries and economies requires dedication and commitment from numerous stakeholders, ranging from the government to the private sector. That's why the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety and the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh—two coalitions of brands that source garments from Bangladesh—have undertaken an enormous and unprecedented effort to inspect every factory from which their members source, and to ensure that safety issues are thoroughly addressed.

The private sector is crucial to this effort and its contributions are evident through its leadership in designing, executing, funding and monitoring these initiatives. But both the Alliance and the Accord have five-year time horizons—and their work needs to be adopted, replicated and sustained. The only way for that to happen is if the government of Bangladesh invests the time and resources necessary to ensure the safety of its RMG factory workers—including establishing systems and hiring the personnel necessary to ensure safety in all its factories.

The 2012 fire at Tazreen Fashions and the 2013 collapse of Rana Plaza together took more than 1,200 lives. These tragedies happened due to a systematic failure to enforce laws, regulations and building codes; a lack of meaningful labour inspections and a lack of accountability for decision makers. Looking forward, how do we ensure that tragedies like Tazreen and Rana never happen again?

Part of our work is to support industry reforms that will deliver a working environment where workers are treated justly and with respect. We must take precautions, adopt best practices, and put in place mechanisms that protect health and safety for all. We must also hold factory owners accountable for the safety of their factories and for the manner in which they treat their employees.

The government of Bangladesh has a very specific role to play. Only the government has the authority to provide a legal and regulatory foundation that ensures that laws are up-to-date and implemented in an expeditious manner.

We continue to wait for the regulations to implement the 2013 amendments to the Bangladesh Labor Act (BLA), and the Alliance is eager to move forward piloting a program for occupational safety and health committees, as required under the updated BLA. Every day that passes without these regulations continues to delay implementation of reforms and exposes garment factory workers to continued risks to their personal safety and economic security.

Numerous plans and strategies require full support from the government of Bangladesh, including implementing the National Tripartite Action Plan, the 2013 Sustainability Compact and the 2013 United States Action Plan for reinstating benefits under the Generalized System of Preferences program.

The government of Bangladesh must demonstrate its commitment to implementing reforms that will protect the RMG sector and secure the jobs of more than 8m people. The Alliance, the Accord, donor governments and other stakeholders stand ready to assist in implementing these measures, but a plan of action with specific deadlines and clear commitments is critical to achieving success.

Failure to protect garment factory workers through these straightforward reforms not only imperils the hard-fought reforms achieved thus far, it endangers the entire economy of Bangladesh.

Despite challenges, there is no doubt that many of us—spanning public, private, government and non-government sectors—share a common purpose. By uniting our unique roles and abilities to affect change, we can make Bangladesh's RMG sector safer, sustainable and ready for further growth long into the future.

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