

Monday 24 April

Rana Plaza 10 years on: The human cost of fashion

On April 24 2013, the eight-storey Rana Plaza building housing 5 garment factories in Dhaka, Bangladesh, collapsed, crushing 1134 workers to death and injuring more than 2500.

Most of the victims were women, paid a pittance to produce fashion for global fashion brands. The warning signs were obvious: cracks in the building were reported the previous day, yet nothing was done.

The tragedy was a global wake-up call that shone a light on what unions and workers already knew – that to create safer workplaces, legally enforceable rights are essential.

Unions in Australia and around the world, campaigned to win The Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety which was established soon after the disaster. This Accord is a legally binding agreement between unions, garment retailers and brands with key components ensuring independent inspections, health and safety committees and the right to refuse unsafe work.

In December 2022, the Accord became the International Accord on Health & Safety and now covers garment and textile factories in Pakistan and will continue to expand its reach thanks to the hard work and bravery of local and global trade unionists pressuring high street brands to accept their responsibilities to suppliers.

The ACTU and its affiliated unions call on Australian brands to sign up to the Accord, so no one risks their life simply by going to work making the clothes we wear.

We also urge Australian garment retailers to take a more ethical approach to their supply chains, both at home and abroad. During the COVID period, some Australian manufacturers cancelled large orders with Bangladeshi factories, leaving workers stranded.

Australian consumers who want to support locally, ethically made fashion can choose brands accredited by Ethical Clothing Australia

On this 10th anniversary of the Rana Plaza collapse, we remember and honour those who lost their lives and mark the progress made since to protect garment workers around the world.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O Neil:

“The Rana Plaza collapse was the inevitable result of greedy corporations putting profit ahead of workers’ lives and safety.

“On this anniversary we mourn for those who lost their lives in a preventable tragedy, and we honour them by fighting to ensure such a disaster never happens again.”

The work of unionists in Australia and globally has, through the International Accord on Health & Safety, literally saved lives but more needs to be done.

“The global demand for fast fashion has real consequences for workers. If we are to truly say ‘never again’, a fitting tribute on this anniversary would be for more Australian manufacturers to sign up to the [International Accord on Health and Safety](#).”

Quotes attributable to Jenny Kruschel, Textile, Clothing, Footwear National Secretary CFMEU Manufacturing Division:

“The Rights for Garment workers to organise and be organised by Unions is a fundamental right, we should expect no less.

“The campaign and commitment to ensure Garment workers can work in safe workplaces, be paid a living wage, and be treated with dignity must continue, exploitation in the name of fashion is not acceptable.

“Manufacturer`s and Brands of Global TCF supply chains must be transparent and accountable.

“The anniversary of the Rana Plaza collapse is a time to commemorate the many workers who lost their lives working for fashion and remember that thousands of garment workers continue to work in unsafe workplaces. We must continue to campaign and fight for the rights of garment workers around the world.

“Say no to exploitation”.

ENDS

Media contact: Gareth Hathway 0499878782