



Statement by Commissioners Malmström, Thyssen and Mimica on the 3rd anniversary of the Rana Plaza tragedy

Brussels, 22 April 2016

"On Sunday 24 April 2016, it will be exactly three years since the collapse of the Rana Plaza garment factory in Dhaka, Bangladesh, a tragic event that claimed more than 1,100 lives.

Our thoughts today go first of all to the relatives who lost their loved ones, to the injured and all those affected by the Rana Plaza tragedy. But this is also time to look back at what has already been done in those last three years to improve the situation of Bangladeshi garment workers.

The active engagement of the EU, Bangladesh and other concerned partners has brought tangible progress on the ground. A number of labour rights are better protected in Bangladesh today than they were two years ago. The building and workplace safety have also improved. The [Bangladesh Sustainability Compact](#) opened a dialogue and supported exchanges with stakeholders, including trade unions, employers, buyers and NGOs in the EU, as well as in Bangladesh.

Nevertheless, essential reforms – not least as regards the effective respect of trade union rights and promotion of genuine social dialogue – are still needed to ensure a better future for Bangladeshi garment industry workers.

As a partner in the Bangladesh Sustainability Compact, the EU - together with the government of Bangladesh, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and the governments of the US and Canada - regularly assesses progress and contributes to setting priorities for future work, with a view to foster respect for fundamental labour rights and ensure worker safety and health in the Bangladeshi garment sector.

The EU sees still an urgent need to swiftly investigate and prosecute all acts of anti-union discrimination, including in export zones. Trade union registration must be transparent and carried out expeditiously in accordance with objective criteria and unfair labour practices have to be effectively prevented. The Government of Bangladesh has shown a clear commitment but more work remains as well as regards labour inspections. Repairs and remediation plans in all factories have notably still to be effectively and diligently implemented. To serve this purpose, the EU and other donors have mobilised funds that are available to companies facing financing difficulties, in particular SMEs.

In the coming weeks, the EU will publish a third report on the implementation of the Compact, which will provide a detailed overview of achievements and of work that remains to be done.

Close cooperation of all actors is the most effective way forward. Their commitment has been and will remain key in driving progress. All need to stay engaged in order to promote decent working conditions for Bangladeshi garment workers. Our joint work must continue in the long-term.

The EU's commitment remains unchanged: the EU will remain closely engaged to bring lasting improvements to Bangladesh's garment industry and ensure that the EU's open market helps to spur prosperity into the country.

To improve the responsible management of the supply chain in the garment sector is an important issue not just in Bangladesh, but equally in other countries. In order to discuss what action is needed, which initiatives are already ongoing and whether there would be added value of complementary action at the EU, the Commission will host a high-level conference next week. "

Background

In reaction to the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory in April 2013, the Government of Bangladesh, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the European Union and the United States launched a joint initiative known as the "Compact for Continuous Improvements in Labour Rights and Factory Safety in the Ready-Made Garment and Knitwear Industry in Bangladesh". Given its involvement in the same supply chains and its own efforts to promote sustainable sourcing, Canada decided to join the initiative as of 2016.

The Compact outlines concrete commitments in respect of labour rights, in particular freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, as well as structural integrity of factory buildings, occupational safety and health, and promotion of responsible business conduct.

The European Commission has been working closely with the other Compact partners to translate its commitments into tangible improvements. To this aim, the Commission hosted in October 2014 the first Compact follow-up meeting and released two technical reports, in July 2014 and April 2015. A second follow-up meeting was organised by the government of Bangladesh in Dhaka on 28 January 2016.

The private sector initiatives are also significantly contributing towards fulfilment of the Compact, notably through "The Accord on Fire and Building Safety" in Bangladesh which brings together trade unions and fashion and retail brands.

On Monday 25th April, a high-level event on the garment sector is being held to promote successful existing initiatives. Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven **Mimica**, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen**, the Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Lilianne Ploumen and the State Minister of Labour and Employment for Bangladesh, Mujibul Haque Chunnu are expected to attend.

Finally, in October 2015, the [EU contributed €3 million to the G7's "Vision Zero Fund"](#), to improve working conditions and labour standards, and establish sustainable business practices in producing countries.

For more information

[The Sustainability Compact document](#)

[Last year progress report \(24 April 2015\)](#)

[EU-Bangladesh trade relations](#)

[EU-Bangladesh political relations](#)

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Press contacts:

[Daniel ROSARIO](#) (+ 32 2 295 61 85)

[Alexandre POLACK](#) (+32 2 299 06 77)

[Christian WIGAND](#) (+32 2 296 22 53)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)