

Movement of the minimum 25-thousand-taka wage!

Workers of the world Unite!!

Not by Charity, but demand will be claimed by the movement.

Justified demand, love and solidarity are our strength.

21st October 2023

To

Axel Schütz

Friedrich-von-Alberti-Gymnasium

Axel Schütz

Hoe Str. 30

74177 Bad Friedrichshall

Germany

Open Letter for International Solidarity with the Wage Increase Movement for RMG workers in Bangladesh

Dear Axel

Greetings from a coalition of 11 national garment workers' rights organizations under the united platform *The Garment Workers' Movement for Wage Increase*

We have reached a critical juncture in Bangladesh. On October 22, the Wage Board for garment workers will propose a new wage structure. As the backbone of Bangladesh's economy, garment workers have endured hardships due to prolonged delays in determining their wages. Four million young workers have sacrificed their youth, nutrition, and well-being to foster the growth of the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector. But they have not received their share of that development. Workers are now compelled to contemplate even the most basic expenses, like purchasing an egg to go with their rice, in the face of the current soaring market prices. Many workers, after their gruelling shifts at the factory, can only afford vegetables from the grocery when returning home. The luxury of consuming fish, meat, or fruits regularly is now beyond their reach. Ensuring a dignified life for workers is undoubtedly essential for the sustainability of high-quality productivity.

Workers and the industry are closely interconnected. Without the well-being of workers, the prosperity of the industry is unachievable. Therefore, we have called to the Wage Board, which includes representatives from owners, the government, and workers representatives, to speed up wage increases. We have also called the government to implement measures to shield workers from the challenges posed by inflation and deflation. Additionally, we have called buyers to pay more for Cost of Making (CM) of our products. We hope that in our effort to advance the wage movement for RMG workers, you will stand with us in our fight from your respective position.

We, as 11 organizations advocating for a minimum wage increase for RMG workers, have demanded TK 25,000, while other organizations have asked for TK 23,000. Over the past year, we've taken various steps to justify our demand, including worker meetings, extensive publicity, following work plans, engaging with various groups such as students, women, workers, political parties, economists, researchers, and others to shape public opinion. We've also organized gatherings and protests and submitted memorandum to both BGMEA and the wage board. These activities and their coverage have been featured in national newspapers and electronic media.

We believe that a living wage is essential to improve the quality of 4 million workers life. A living wage is not a matter of the will of the owner, the market, or the government, but the right of the worker. Because on this worker, their children and family depend. The wage we claim is by no means a living wage, we have claimed only minimum wage to survive. We have calculated the market rate of

TCB and other basic needs and expenses including the expenses of the worker's family as the basis of our 25-thousand-taka wage proposal. Other studies including ours have shown that a worker's family spends more than 40,000 taka including food and other expenses. However, considering the capacity of the country and the industry, we have demanded TK 25 thousand.

What we are advocating for is not only the minimum wage but a living wage, taking into account the basic needs and expenses, including the cost of living in the TCB market rate (<https://bit.ly/3rQjtdG>) and the expenses of the worker's family. Research, including ours and others has shown that a worker's family incurs expenses exceeding BDT40,000, including food and other costs. However, we have demanded BDT25,000, considering the country's capacity and industry. We also consider different research and studies including us for our demand.

'The latest preliminary report on the government's 'Household Income and Expenditure Survey' was published in April of this year in Bangladesh. It reveals that the average daily calorie consumption in the country is shown as 2,393 per person. The survey mentioned basic consumption bundle that provides minimal nutritional requirements. These items are coarse rice, wheat, pulses, milk, oil, meat, fish, potatoes, vegetables, sugar, and fruits. Egg was left out in the bundle. The workers need at least 3000 kilocalories per day based on their work. But the required kilocalorie for the upper line of official poverty line is around 2,200 kilocalories.

A calculation of the existing prices of these items on 24 September revealed that a four-member family needs at least Tk 23,000 a month only to avail these food items. Adding house rent, transport fare, treatment and study cost of children shows that a four-member family needs at least Tk 40,000 outside Dhaka and Tk 50,000 in Dhaka. In this consideration, the demand of setting minimum wage of Tk 25,000 is rather paltry' (Source: Economist Anu Muhammad: Prothom Alo: <https://bit.ly/3Q6A7xz>)

Additionally, the Global Living Wage Coalition estimates a monthly minimum wage of TK 23,254. When considering the 9.02% inflation rate for 2022-2023 the estimated monthly minimum wage for one-person would-be TK 25,351.

Considering the capabilities of the industry -the owners, we firmly believe that the owners can afford to pay a gross minimum wage of 25,000 Taka to the workers.

We believe that at the end of the day, the united movement and struggle of workers can play a key role in realizing their desired wages. Although the country is currently in a special situation regarding national elections and democracy. The political situation of the country is related to the question of the standards of the workers wellbeing.

Workers sew the 'Made in Bangladesh' tag and when the clothes reach in Europe-America and non-traditional new market. Within this process these young workers also become part of globalization. So, although the primary battle is local, there is also a significant role for all stakeholders in the global supply chain.

We believe that the fight must have three fronts. First, the unity and strong struggle of the garment workers in local ground. Second, as a part of the ideological battle, regular presence, and sustained efforts through various means, including information-gathering and analysis of information, writings, research, and various other means. Third, creating and promoting solidarity and understanding among international labour advocates, allies, and fellow workers. It is for these three reasons that we seek your solidarity in our struggle. The expansion of Bangladesh's garment industry into new markets, including Europe and America, has been significant, and we believe that both local and international struggles will strengthen us.

We want to raise the question about the role of international advocates and brands. We believe that our fight is not just for the workers of Bangladesh but equally important for workers worldwide. Because our workers are members of Bangladesh as well as members of this world.

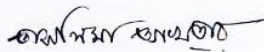
Below are our demands:

1. Immediate announcement of a minimum wage of TK 25,000 for garment workers, with a 65% basic.
2. Instead of 7 grades, 5 grades should be ensured in the wage structure.
3. Workers working on sweater and piece rates should be paid full basic during pre-work wage determination and off season. The Basic for Jacket and Linking Operator's will be as per grade-3. Three shifts and overtime must be ensured in sweaters.
4. Equal wage increases and a 10% increment in basic wages should be provided inside and outside factories of EPZ. Ensure the mandatory provident fund.
5. Establish a permanent rationing system for the distribution of essential goods, such as rice, flour, oil, and baby food, through ration cards. The government and owners must initiate life insurance, healthcare, and education provisions for workers.
6. Retrenchment of workers, false cases, attacks, and torture must be stopped. Repeal the Prohibition of Strikes Essential Services Bill, 2023.
7. Ensure accountability of owners-government and buyer for the improvement of workers' living standards.

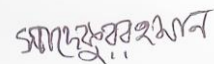
We place special importance to aspects such as a living wage, a dignified life, a proper work environment, the protection of female workers rights, a workplace free from gender discrimination and an environment friendly workplace. We hope to gain your Solidarity in our campaign to raise minimum wage to TK 25,000 for RMG workers. The bridge of solidarity will strengthen our fight. Because we believe that our mutual trust, love, and solidarity, along with the justice of our fight, will take us forward.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

In Solidarity



Taslima Akhtar, Coordinator, *The Garment Workers' Movement for Wage Increase*.
President, Bangladesh Garments Workers Solidarity.



Sadekur Rahman Shamim, Secretary-General. *The Garment Workers' Movement for Wage Increase*.
General Secretary, Garment Trade Union Centre (TUC).

On behalf of the workers' movement for wage increase, a coalition of 11 national Garment workers organizations.

1. Garments Workers Unity Forum - President: Mosherafa Mishu, Secretary- Shohidul Islam Shobuj
2. Bangladesh Garment Workers Solidarity - President Taslima Akhtar, Secretary-Babul Hossain
3. Garment Workers Trade Union Centre - President: Montu Ghosh, Secretary- Sadekur Rahman Shamim
4. Bangladesh Textile Garments Workers Federation - President: Advocate Mahbubur Rahman Ismail.
5. Garments Workers Liberation Movement - Executive President: Shamim Imam.
6. OSK Garments and Textile Workers Federation - General Secretary: Prakash Datta.
7. Revolutionary Garment Workers Solidarity - President: Mahmud Hossain
8. Garments Workers Federation - President: Raju Ahmed.
9. National Sweater Garments Workers Federation - President: Foyez Hossen.
10. Garments Workers Movement. .Organiser: Biplob Bhattacharja
11. Garment Sromik Shobha-Shohidul Islam

