



Garment workers in  
Bangladesh  
fight back and win.  
The Institute  
initiates turnaround  
in major  
apparel producers.



# UNPRECEDENTED CHANGES

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Next Collections Limited factory in Ashulia, Bangladesh.

## PREFACE

# Breakthrough in Bangladesh, Millions of Garment Workers Will Benefit

By Charles Kernaghan  
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I never thought we would see the day when Bangladeshi garment workers would work an eight-hour shift, six days a week for a 48-hour workweek. But that is exactly what is happening in the Ha-Meem and Windy Group factories — and soon will be in other factories where workers and the Institute have demanded changes.

Today for the 60,000 workers of the Ha-Meem and Windy Groups of factories, all overtime is now voluntary and paid at the legal double time rate — which is 84 cents an hour for a senior worker. Total workweek cannot exceed 60 hours. For the first time, women garment workers are receiving their full maternity leave and benefits, whereas just months ago, pregnant women were routinely fired, robbed of their legal rights, and often threatened and beaten if they persisted in demanding their legal rights.

At the Next Collections factory, we were able to demand the firing of ten corrupt and highly abusive senior managers. Today, the workers are no longer beaten, forced to toil 14- to 17-hour shifts, seven days a week, and cheated of their wages and overtime. Thanks to serious and ongoing collaboration among the workers, the Institute and Gap, some 50,000 workers at Next Collections and other factories belonging to the giant Ha-Meem Group receive their legal benefits and decent working conditions.

And, in July, the Institute reached out to the Swedish retailer H&M with regard to poor conditions at the 10,000 worker Windy Group in Bangladesh. Once alerted, H&M and the Windy Group immediately initiated major improvements. Overtime hours have been reduced.

Workers now receive Fridays and national holidays off. All hours are recorded and paid correctly. Pregnant women workers are now treated well and paid their correct maternity leave.

These Bangladeshi garment workers are telling us that their working conditions, hours, wages and benefits — and their lives — are far better now.

**We believe that this is a moment when change is possible in Bangladesh, and that with continued attention, pressure and solidarity, it will be possible to win enduring improvements for the 4.5 to 5 million garment workers across Bangladesh.** But, for these changes to endure, there is another missing piece: **Bangladeshi workers must be afforded their rights to organize and to bargain collectively, recognized under Bangladeshi and international law.**





Taniya (top left) and her husband were sewing line supervisors at the Gap supplier Next Collections in Bangladesh. When Taniya demanded her legal paid maternity leave, her husband was threatened, beaten and jailed. Following intervention by the Institute and Gap, Taniya received the maternity leave and other benefits she was owed.

Zesmin (bottom), a senior sewing machine operator at Next Collections had been fired when she was six months pregnant. She too received her maternity, earned leave and severance pay she was owed.

The Daily Star  
DHAKA TUESDAY OCTOBER 14, 2014

## H&M boss in Dhaka to discuss procurement, compliance

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Karl-Johan Persson, chief executive of Swedish retail giant H&M, arrived in Dhaka yesterday to discuss sourcing plans and compliance issues with garment suppliers in Bangladesh.

Persson is scheduled to hold meetings with suppliers and leaders of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association at the H&M office in Dhaka this morning.

The CEO will also meet Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed at his office at 3pm.

This is his second visit to Bangladesh as the CEO of H&M. Persson last came to Bangladesh in September 2012, when he had announced plans to double sourcing from Bangladesh and do business worth \$3 billion in the next five years. H&M sources garment items from more than 250 factories in Bangladesh, a BGMEA official said.

READ MORE ON B3



Karl-Johan Persson

## H&M boss in Dhaka to discuss procurement, compliance

FROM PAGE B1

Currently, H&M has six different brands and 3,300 stores across the globe. The brands are H&M, COS, Monki, Weekday, Cheap Monday and Other Stories.

H&M is the largest apparel sourcing company in Bangladesh. The company also outsources garments from China, Vietnam and Cambodia.

Swedish retail giant H&M does the right thing in Bangladesh

Karl-Johan Persson, H&M's Chief Executive, is now in Bangladesh urging strong compliance rules and regulations to protect worker rights in the garment industry, coupled with continued sourcing in Bangladesh! In short, Bangladeshi garment workers—80 percent of whom are women—will have greater access to their legal rights under Bangladesh and international law. H&M sources garments from more than 250 factories in Bangladesh.



## Some of the Poorest Workers in the World Fight Back and Win

For the last 31 years, from 1983 to 2014, the Bangladeshi garment industry has been booming. **Bangladesh is now the second largest garment manufacturer in the world, right behind China.** Bangladesh's lifeline, garment exports — which account for 80 percent of the country's export earnings, an expected \$26.9 billion in 2014 — is driven by the nearly five million mostly young women garment workers.

The Bangladeshi garment workers, accompanied by the Institute for Global Labour and Human Rights, led the groundbreaking improvements at some of Bangladesh's largest apparel producers, including Next Collections, That's It Sportswear and the entire Ha-Meem Group with its 26 factories and over 50,000 workers. The Institute and the garment workers played the same pivotal role at the Windy Group, which has now dramatically improved worker rights practices to the benefit of 10,000 workers.







## Unprecedented Improvements at Next Collections Ltd.

### Institute for Global Labour and Human Rights Initiates Turnaround at Next Collections Ltd.

The story starts in October 2013 at a brutal sweatshop in Dhaka, called Next Collections (part of the giant Ha-Meem Group), where thousands of workers were routinely forced to toil 14- to 17-plus-hour shifts, seven days a week. The exhausted workers — 80 percent women — toiled 100 to 120 hours a week. The workers we met with were dazed, exhausted, and so sick and numb they could barely talk. The Next Collections workers were often beaten and routinely robbed of 15 percent of their overtime wages. Management kept two sets of books — the phony one to satisfy the labels and the real one. No one helped the workers who earned just 20 to 24 cents an hour. Pregnant women were illegally terminated and denied their maternity leave and benefits. Over the years, workers were robbed of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Next Collections workers lived in miserable hovels.

Over the course of several months, the Institute collaborated with dozens of workers who provided testimonies, tracked their work hours, and collected labels, phony pay slips and company documents. On October 3, 2013, the Institute released its major report on the horrific conditions at the Next Collections factory.

### Wall Street Journal Exposé

At roughly the same time, in October 2013, the *Wall Street Journal* launched their own independent investigation at the Next Collections factory and also [found](#) gross worker rights violations.

**In one of the worst sweatshops in Bangladesh, workers fought back and are treated with respect according to the law and paid properly. Women workers now have their right to maternity leave and benefits.**

### Over 4,500 Next Collections Workers Benefit

The Bangladeshi workers, the Pittsburgh-based Institute for Global Labour and Human Rights, our dedicated team on the ground in Bangladesh, Gap and Old Navy, the Wall Street Journal, and Next Collections' new management all played an important role in the process of making change at Next Collections:

- **Ten abusive and corrupt senior managers at Next Collections have been fired!**
- After beatings and death threats, for the first time, **women workers are receiving their maternity**

### leave and full benefits.

- After four years of being cheated, today **workers are paid in full** and on time, including all overtime and back wages according to the law.
- Never again will Next Collections workers be forced to work 17- to 20-hour shifts, seven days a week, while being cheated, earning just 20 to 24 cents an hour.
- Workers are no longer threatened, physically abused and fired for demanding their rights.
- Today senior workers **earn 42 cents an hour**, which is the current minimum according to the Bangladeshi government. Overtime must be paid at double time, which is **84 cents an hour**.
- **All overtime is strictly voluntary, and cannot exceed two hours a day, six days a week**, for a regular 48-hour workweek with 12 hours of overtime.

*“We have experienced some real changes in factory conditions in 2014... The new wage structure is now enforced at the factory, and women receive their maternity leave and benefits.”*

— Next Collections worker

### Next Collections workers speak out

“We have experienced some real changes in factory conditions in 2014. Now the work hours are reasonable. They [new management] do not cut our overtime hours as they did in the past. Overtime is now paid correctly and on time. The new wage structure is now enforced at the factory, and women receive their maternity leave and benefits.”

“Pregnant women now work only eight hours a day.”

“Less than a year ago, workers would not dare leave the factory before 11:00 p.m., 1:00 a.m. and even 5:00 a.m. Now we can get off at 5:00 p.m., sometimes at 7:00 p.m., and most of the time overtime is voluntary.”

“Treatment toward workers is much better than before. Payment is on time and complete. Workers have no objections about the wages and payment system.”

(The Next Collections workers have asked to remain anonymous.)

## Major Re-Organization of Management Following Institute’s Report

**Ten Abusive executives, managers and senior supervisors were fired from the Next Collections.**

- 1 Mr. Debu, Executive Director — Fired
- 2 Major Khan Modassar Hossain — Fired
- 3 Mr. Elias Khan, Administrative Officer — Imprisoned for four days and fired
- 4 Mr. Nair Saiful Islam, Production Manager — Fired
- 5 Mr. Aminul Islam, Production Manager — Fired
- 6 Ms. Shamima, Welfare Officer — Fired
- 7 Mr. Raju, Chief of Finishing Section — Fired
- 8 Mr. Monju, Senior Finishing Supervisor — Fired
- 9 Mr. Ayub, Security Officer — Fired
- 10 Mr. Liton, General Manager — Fired and transferred from Next Collections to Ha-Meem Group headquarters

(December 2013 – January 2014)

## Pregnant Women at Next Collections Win Their Rights

After threats, beatings, and denial of their maternity leave, five women received their maternity benefits — \$3,565.38!

Ms. Taniya	135,000 taka	\$1,741.26
Ms. Zesmin	41,000 taka	\$528.83
Ms. Morium	31,000 taka	\$399.85
Ms. Rohima	36,000 taka	\$464.34
Ms. Serina	33,423 taka	\$431.10

(October 2013 – January 2014)

## Workers Paid Back Wages

Workers Win Back Wages  
\$3,673.68 in total

Mr. Saydur Rahman	18,230 taka	\$235.13
Mr. Shadin	19,120 taka	\$246.61
Ms. Roxana	24,230 taka	\$312.52
Mr. Faruk	29,120 taka	\$375.60
Mr. Shorab Hosain	18,166 taka	\$234.31
Ms. Shirina	13,596 taka	\$175.36
Ms. Jewel Miah	20,213 taka	\$260.71
Mr. Askash Miah	10,187 taka	\$131.39
Mr. Mizanur Rahman	13,706 taka	\$176.78
Mr. Rasel Mahmud	13,754 taka	\$177.40
Mr. Mazaharul Islam	92,000 taka	\$1,186.64
Mr. Saroyar	12,500 taka	\$161.23

(February to April 2014)

## Another Breakthrough: Overtime and Legal Holidays Paid in Full

Before:

For nearly four years, management handed out phony pay slips to pretend that Next Collections was in compliance with legal hours and wages. But in fact, **Next Collections workers were paid in cash, off the books, and cheated of 15 percent of their grueling overtime hours!**

After:

Workers are no longer shortchanged on their regular and overtime hours. Workers are now paid in full. They have the day off on Fridays (the Muslim weekly holiday) and no one works past 7:00 p.m. Workers told us, **“We are satisfied with the payment system as we are no longer cheated of our wages and overtime.** And if we work on Fridays, we are paid at a double premium. There are no more ‘double books’ to cheat us, and now we get paid for holidays like Bengali New Year [April 14], May Day and Eid.”

## Gap and Old Navy Do the Right Thing

To their credit, Gap and Old Navy did the right thing as their production remains **60 percent of total production** at Next Collections. **This demonstrated that Gap would not cut and run, but rather would stay for the long term.** This is a major step forward for Gap and the Bangladeshi workers.

## Improvements at Next Collections

“Back in September 2013, workers at Next Collections Limited were routinely forced to toil 200 to 210 hours of overtime each month! It’s way better for us now! In comparison with 2013, we are pleased with the present overtime hours. It is very positive that overtime hours have now been cut back by 50 percent! Of course we want to work overtime so we can increase our wages, but we can’t work 200 hours of OT, like in the past. Back then workers were dazed and sick. We can work 120 to 130 overtime hours a month as long as we get Fridays off.”

“In May-June there was still some compulsory overtime when shipments must go out. **Now we can voluntarily leave the factory at 5:00 p.m. or 7:00 p.m.**”

“**Our wages are a bit higher now**, and we can buy better food, like chicken, fish and eggs. Overtime also helps. Now we can purchase some of the seasonal fruits like mango, lychee, and jackfruit. For our infants, we can now sometimes buy milk and baby food.”

“**Forced overtime has been ended. Our overtime is paid in full.** And we’re paid on time. Night shift work has stopped and now **maternity leave and benefits are given according to the law.** The abusive managers and officers have been removed. Moreover, overtime is limited and perfectly shown on our pay stubs. We are no longer shortchanged of our overtime.”



Saydur, former Next Collections worker:

“It is symbolic that Next Collections Limited had to end the abuses and finally we won our struggle. It is the first time in the history of Next Collections that management was obligated to repay all the outstanding wages of the fired workers. They have learned a lesson, that they will not get away with abusing the workers.”





### **The Case of Morium Begum Denied Maternity Leave and Benefits**

“You should know that I had to work from 8:00 a.m. on June 24 to 7:00 a.m. on June 25. That is a 23-hour shift!.... I was obligated to do that even being pregnant...

“That was my first baby, which I lost. The grueling hours, constant strain and pressure to reach excessive production goals all led to the death of my baby. For me, it is a loss I will never get over.”

- Morium Begum, July 2013

11 months later Ms. Begum is pregnant and healthy:

“In January 2014, Morium was transferred to That’s It Sportswear Limited (a part of the Ha-Meem Group). Now she is five months pregnant. Factory management takes care of her. She leaves the factory at 5:00 p.m. Now she can consult with the factory doctor and receive prenatal care. Overtime is not mandatory for pregnant women. Management recently told Morium that if she needs to take a day off, she should, as it is more important that she take care of her pregnancy.”

- IGLHR Dhaka team, June 2014



### Worldwide Clothing Exports Reach \$460 Billion

**Bangladesh's garment industry is now the second largest in the world — in terms of volume of garments exported — and third in terms of dollar value.**

Bangladesh's garment industry is now the world's second largest exporter of garments worldwide after China.

According to the World Trade Organization, Bangladesh's garment workers sewed **\$23.5 billion** worth of garments for export in 2013. China exported \$177.4 billion worth of apparel. Other major garment exporters include Vietnam (exporting \$17.2 billion worth of apparel), India (\$16.8 billion) and Turkey (\$15.4 billion).



# Empowering Some of the Poorest Workers in the World

## Institute Reforms Extended to That's It Sportswear Limited and the Ha-Meem Group, But Workers Still Do Not Have the Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

That's It Sportswear is one of the Ha-Meem Group's largest apparel factories with 51 production lines and some **8,500 workers** — who have now greatly benefitted from the changes that began at Next Collections.

According to the workers we spoke with, treatment is much better now.

Top management at That's It Sportswear has prohibited all physical abuse — beatings, slapping, punching, and kicking workers.

Pregnant women are now treated with respect and, in most cases, are free to leave early at 5:00 p.m. If a pregnant woman worker asks for a leave of absence, her supervisor will now grant the leave.

There are now special facilities to take care of the health of pregnant workers. In the last two months, three pregnant sewing operators have been provided with their maternity leave and full benefits.

Workers are paid on the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> day of the following month. Regular wages and overtime are paid at the same time and properly. Workers are no longer cheated of overtime hours, and pay stubs that are provided reflect all the hours actually worked.

**Now representatives from various buyers visit the factory floors two or three times a week! Management is under continued pressure to maintain decent working conditions.**

As of July 2014, no workers toil past 7:00 p.m.

The daily work schedule is as follows:

8:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.	5 hours, work
1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.	1 hour, lunch break
2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.	3 hours, work
5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.	2 hours, overtime

At most, workers toil eight-hour shifts with two hours of overtime, for a total of 10 hours a day, six days a week, for a 60-hour workweek. **All overtime must be voluntary.**

### Doing the right thing

Gap and Old Navy did not cut and run, but rather, stayed with it as improvements were made at That's It Sportswear. **Gap and Old Navy now account for 30 percent of total production** at the That's It Sportswear factory. Other labels at That's It Sportswear include: **Izod** and **Arrow**

(PVH), **American Eagle, OshKosh B'gosh, Abercrombie & Fitch, G.H. Bass, and Wrangler** (VF Corporation).

Changes at That's It Sportswear include:

- No night shifts;
- No physical punishment;
- No verbal abuse;
- Police harassment has stopped;
- Workers receive correct pay stubs reflecting the actual regular and overtime hours worked;
- Workers receive a weekly day off on Friday (the weekly holiday);
- Pregnant women workers receive maternity leave with benefits;
- All overtime is voluntary and cannot exceed two hours a day, six days a week, paid at the legal double time overtime rate (84 cents an hour for senior sewing operators).

### Ha-Meem Group, Bangladesh

- 5 million garments produced each month
- 60 million garments per year
- Turnover of 400 million USD per year
- 250 production lines
- 26 garment factories
- 5 washing facilities
- Overseas offices in China and Hong Kong

Ha-Meem Apparel Production Group includes:

- That's It Sportswear Ltd. (40 production lines)
- Next Collections Limited
- Apparels Gallery Ltd., Units 1 and 2 (20 production lines)
- That's It Fashions Ltd. (18 production lines)
- Refat Garments Ltd. (15 production lines)
- Artistic Design Ltd. (11 production lines)
- Trouser Line Ltd. (9 production lines)
- That's It Garments Ltd. (6 production lines)
- Ha-Meem Design Ltd. (4 production lines)
- Creative Collections

## Some Problems Remain

### Production Speed-ups

There are 60 to 65 sewing operators per line, plus helpers, bringing the total number of workers close to 100. In the past, workers routinely stayed working until at least 10:00 p.m. to meet their production goals. Now — for the better — workers cannot remain past 7:00 p.m. However, as of mid-2014, the hourly workload has been significantly increased, putting workers under constant pressure to meet their mandatory production quotas.

Workers now often cut their lunch breaks short in order to keep up with their production goals. Many workers have stopped drinking water so they will not have to use the toilet. They feel they cannot stop, even for a few seconds to stand up and stretch. If workers fail to reach their production goal, they will have to remain for 10, 20 or even 30 minutes extra without overtime pay to complete their target.

“*After the report, we are pretty careful on that... We have taken that lesson from the occurrence that we should not do these things.*”

— Delwar Hossain,  
Deputy Managing Director,  
Ha-Meem Group

### Participatory Committee Set Up by Management

“It’s a smokescreen to keep workers from organizing a real worker union,” one activist told us.

In 2014, Ha-Meem Group management began setting up so-called “**Worker Participatory Committees**” in That’s It Sportswear and Next Collections Ltd.

Workers view the Participatory Committees as staged, with no real participation, and controlled by management, particularly Ha-Meem’s “Compliance Officer,” Masudur Rahman. **Workers know they have no voice, and more than anything else, they are terrified they will be identified as union supporters — and blacklisted. There are no real negotiations and moreover, it is common knowledge that management employs spies to watch workers suspected of supporting organizing efforts or speaking to outsiders.**

Still, workers are unequivocal: **Working conditions are now much better than before.**



Photo: Focus Bangla

**Ha-Meem Group’s Deputy Managing Director, Delwar Hossain, speaks on the record** — regarding the positive impact of the Institute’s report on conditions at the Ha-Meem Group’s Next Collections factory:

“Mr Hossain [deputy managing director of Ha-Meem Group] said the problems at Next Collections have been corrected... He said **the company has been vigilant about the problems exposed in the [report](#) at all its factories.**

“**After the [report](#), we are pretty careful on that,**’ Mr. Hossain said. **‘We have taken that lesson from the occurrence that we should not do these things.’**

“**We never do any extra overtime... or anything that is not in the law,**’ Mr. Hossain said.”

- Moriah Balingit, “Long Days a Staple of Garment Industry in Bangladesh,”  
*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Sept 1, 2014



## Windy Group in Bangladesh: Institute Intervenes and Improvements Are Made by H&M

**In September 2014, 10,000 Bangladeshi garment workers see immediate improvements at the Windy Group, thanks to the Institute and H&M.**

Swedish-owned **H&M is the single largest buyer of apparel made in Bangladesh**, which gives the company considerable power for the good. It is estimated that **H&M regularly uses some 250 garment factories across Bangladesh to produce their clothing**. H&M maintains its own monitoring team in its Dhaka office with both native Bangladeshis and foreigners from Sweden.

H&M has acknowledged that in the past there were serious violations in factories contracted to do their production in Bangladesh.

Just several months ago, young women garment workers producing for Windy Apparels and H&M were short-changed of their legal maternity benefits, while being forced to work long hours, six and seven days a week. The Windy Group has been in operation for 14 to 15 years.

In August, Windy Apparels workers were sewing H&M on 11 production lines, making two types of jackets, while one production line was sewing pants for the German s.Oliver label.

On August 7, 2014, the Institute contacted H&M in Sweden regarding violations our team and the workers had documented.

**The good news is that H&M's intervention has been swift and effective.**

On Thursday, August 21, four representatives from H&M visited Windy Apparels factory to see that the sewing section was closed at 5:00 p.m. while the work of the finishing section ended at 7:00 p.m. On Friday, August 22, all units were closed for the weekly holiday. The entire factory was also shut down the following Friday, August 29 and subsequent Fridays to date. **Pregnant women workers at Windy Apparels now have full access to their legal maternity leave with benefits.**



**Today, workers at the Windy Group are very satisfied with the improvements at their factories.**

- No one works past 7:00 p.m.
- The regular shift is from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with an hour break for lunch, six days a week, for a 48-hour workweek.
- Workers can volunteer for two hours of overtime, six days a week, for 12 hours of overtime. All overtime is paid correctly at double time, which is 84 cents an hour for senior workers.
- No one works more than 60 hours a week, including overtime.
- All Fridays are off.
- Verbal abuse has been ended.
- Pregnant women workers have access to maternity leave and benefits.

### **H&M's Real Power for the Good**

We hope that H&M would take the same stance in Bangladesh as the company does in Sweden. **In Sweden, 67.7 percent of workers belong to strong unions, and garment workers in Sweden earn \$42 an hour.**

**It is critical that garment workers in Bangladesh have the same internationally recognized rights to organize a union and bargain collectively.** If anyone desperately needs a strong union, it is certainly the Bangladeshi garment workers, some of the poorest workers in the world, 80 percent of whom are young women. This would be a tremendous legacy for H&M.

Imagine if the Bangladeshi garment workers were paid 52 cents an hour — 10 cents more than the current wage of 42 cents an hour — how much better their lives would be. This is certainly worth exploring.



### **Maternity Benefits Are Implemented As They Are Meant to Be Thanks to the Institute, H&M, and the Windy Group**

When Ms. Khaleda, a young Seamstress at Windy Apparel, went out on maternity leave, she received her **initial maternity benefit** of 20,000 taka, or **\$257.96**, and was afraid that she would not see any more. In the past, pregnant women were often cheated of the second half of their maternity benefits. **However, when H&M intervened, Ms Khaleda immediately received her remaining maternity benefits of 23,300 taka (\$300.53).**

And something she did not expect, Ms. Khaleda also received her **“earned leave” (vacation pay) along with her severance pay, which totaled another 30,280 taka (\$390.56).** Altogether, Khaleda received **\$949.05**, which is a lot of money for a garment worker in Bangladesh.

This is the way such benefits are supposed to be provided, and when that happens they provide critical support for young women and their spouses as they are starting their families.





## Khaleda's Testimony in July 2014

To be clear, in the past at Windy Apparels, conditions for pregnant women were not always perfect. They were forced to toil long hours, and routinely cheated of well over half their maternity benefits. Because of determined young women like Khaleda, **women workers at Windy Apparels now receive their full maternity leave and benefits — which makes a world of difference for their children.**

See Khaleda's full testimony below.

"I am Khaleda. I am 22 years old. I joined Windy Apparels on January 8, 2007 when I was just 16 years old. My ID number at the factory is 203 and I am a senior machine operator on the "D" line. I worked more than seven years at Windy Apparels. Starting January 2014, my base wage was Tk 4,075 [\$52.57] and my full wage was Tk. 6,805 [\$87.78] for the regular hours. The overtime rate is Tk 39.18 [51 cents] an hour.

"In November 2013, I earned a total of Tk 8,000 [\$103.20] and in December 2013, Tk 9,500 [\$122.54]. For the month of January 2014 [working 28 days], I earned Tk 8,500 [\$109.64].

"For the last three months, before going out on

***"I can't even afford to buy milk for my daughter. I desperately need the four months maternity pay that is legally due me."***

— Khaleda, Sewing Machine Operator at Windy Apparels

maternity leave, I earned an average wage of Tk 8,666 [\$111.79]. **For the four months of maternity leave, I should have received Tk 34,666 [\$447.17].**

**"Instead, Windy Apparels gave me just Tk 20,000 [\$257.99] for my maternity leave, cheating me of \$189.18.**

"My last day at work at Windy Apparels was January 28, 2014. I was supposed to resume working at Windy Apparels on May 19, 2014.

"On March 22, 2014 at 9:00 p.m. I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl at my parents' house in the north of Bangladesh in the district of Mymensingh. The name of my baby is Snikdhah. My husband also works at a garment factory, and now we live in the village of Yearpur in Ashulia, near Windy Apparels.

"I went to see Ms. Jhuma, the compliance officer, in December 2013 to ask for my maternity leave and benefits. **She told me to go out on maternity leave and arranged for me to receive a total of Tk. 20,000 for my maternity benefits. She told me to return to the factory in late March after my delivery to receive the rest.**

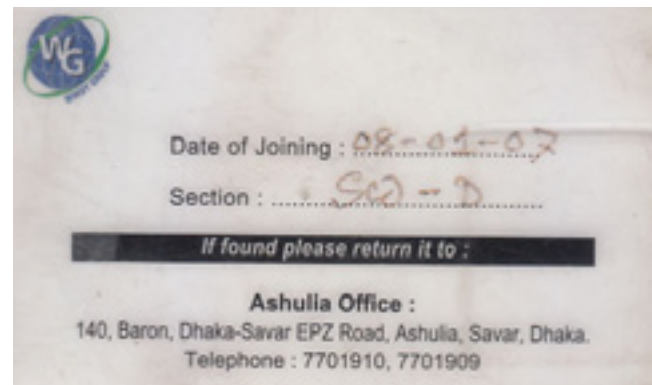
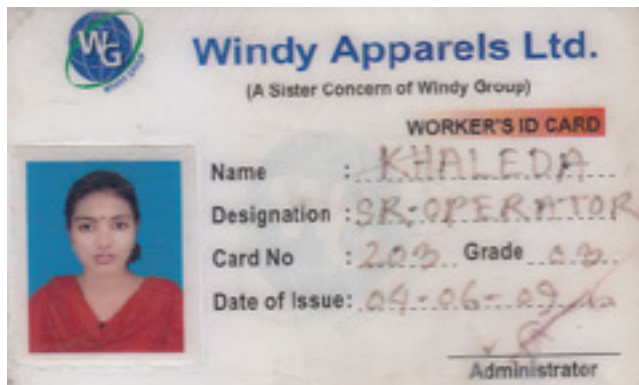
"I called Ms. Jhuma on March 30 after my delivery and asked for the rest of my maternity benefits. She never intended to pay my benefits, and then she refused to take my phone calls.

**"On May 2, 2014 I went to the factory gate to try to get my maternity benefits, but the security guards would not allow me to enter the factory. Then I made a phone call to another compliance officer,**





Khaleda and her baby girl.



Mr. Raju, who told me that the company would not pay the rest of the money. Then he said, **“Don’t come to the factory any more to bother us.”**

**“I was upset. The factory even refused to pay the earned leave money due me for the year 2013. My baby is now three and a half months old. She needs baby food. But I can’t even afford to buy milk for my daughter. I desperately need the four months maternity pay that is legally due me.**

“I’ve worked seven years at Windy Apparels and I am bitter at how I was robbed. **Most of the time, I worked from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., 14-hour shifts. The factory never stops on Fridays.** I often worked seven days a week, putting in all my effort to reach our production goals.

**“Before the birth of my daughter, I worked 100 to 110 hours of overtime each month, and I never neglected my work. How can a company like Windy Apparels cheat women workers of almost half of our maternity leave, not to mention the earned leave money owed us? For my daughter, I desperately need the rest of the money Windy Apparels stole from me. Please help us.**

Following intervention by H&M, Khaleda was paid her full maternity benefits on September 3, 2014.



## Windy Group in Bangladesh

Approximately 10,000 Workers  
As of September 7, 2014

Windy Apparels Ltd	2,000 workers
Hollywood Garments	1,000 workers
Union Sports Wear Ltd.	976 workers
Vintage Garments	900 workers
Tanaz Fashions	2,000 workers
Union Sportswear (Unit 2)	1,000 workers
Washing units	
Windy Wet and Dry Process	
Unit 2	400 workers
Unit 3	450 workers



## Bangladesh Commerce Minister, Tofail Ahmed Visits Washington, D.C., Attacks Bangladeshi Trade Unions

What were they afraid of?

The president of the powerful Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, Mr. Mohammed Atiqul Islam, joined Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed in a visit Washington, D.C. on June 22, 2014.

On his return to Bangladesh, Mr. Ahmed told reporters that he was certain that union **“conspiracies are afoot to damage the RMG [ready-made garment] industry”** and that **“several of our labor leaders have secretly written to [the Americans].... We should contemplate steps against them.”** His real concern: **the need to keep Bangladeshi union leaders from talking to U.S. Congressmen!**

(Josh Eidelson, “A Year After Deadly Bangladesh Factory Disaster, How Much Has Changed!” *Bloomberg Businessweek*, July 28, 2014.)



## Current Status of Garment Workers' Rights in Bangladesh

- On one hand, the Bangladesh government says that the **4.5 to 5 million garment workers** — 80 percent of whom are young women — are free to join unions and to bargain collectively.
- On the other hand, according to workers interviewed, **the main fear that Bangladeshi workers have is losing their jobs for daring to join a union.** After 31 years of a booming garment industry, workers are still afraid to exercise their legal right to organize.
- Line chiefs often tell the workers that they are being watched: **“We know what you are doing...you are signing union memberships, but the company has spies. If you are seen joining a union organizing drive, someone might harm you’... This is the reason many workers are scared to become union members,”** workers explain.
- The garment industry in Bangladesh is booming — a **\$26.9 billion** a year juggernaut! But after 31 years, few if any of the larger factories are organized.
- A highly qualified source on the ground in Bangladesh comments: **“I have never heard of any union federation being able to form a union at one of the very large factories — where there are 2,000, 3,000, 4,000 or more workers”** — such as Next Collections and the Ha-Meem Group.” (In the last year and a half, it seems there has been some limited success in organizing unions at some of the smaller garment factories with 250 to 1,000 workers, but **to date well under 30 have succeeded in bargaining collective contracts.**)
- **The tariff breaks under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) program should remain suspended for Bangladesh.** It was only in April 2013 that 1,138 garment workers were killed and some 2,500 severely injured in the Rana Plaza collapse — the deadliest disaster in the history of the garment industry. As small as it is (GSP tariff breaks cover only \$35 million in exports to the United States and not the nearly \$5 billion worth of garments that Bangladesh exports to the U.S. each year), **the GSP privileges carry symbolic weight with the Bangladeshi government.**

### Ha-Meem Group – No Unions Wanted –

Bangladeshi Shipping Minister, Mr. Shahjahan Khan, **warned union activists not to go ahead with organizing a union** at Ha-Meem Group’s Next Collections factory.

Mr. A.K. Azad, the owner of the sprawling Ha-Meem Group, with 50,000 or more garment workers, told the workers not to proceed with forming an independent union. According to the workers, Mr. Azad made it clear that he did not want American labor activists or non-governmental organizations exposing problems at the Next Collections factory.



## A Long Way to Go

### The European Union, United States and Canada Must Intervene To Support Worker Rights Standards in Bangladesh

- **Just three percent of Bangladesh's over 7,000 garment factories have some limited union presence.**
- **To date, less than 30 Bangladeshi garment manufacturers (well under one half of one percent) have strong unions with collective bargaining rights.**

Of course, there are real and very effective unions, like the Bangladesh Garments and Industrial Workers Federation (BGIWF), the National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF), Bangladesh Garment and Shilpa Sramik Federation (BGSSF), the Textile Garments Workers Federation and its leader, labor lawyer Abul Hossain, and others. Still, **according to the Ministry of Labor, just 215 of Bangladesh's approximately 7,300 garment factories have some union presence.**

Bangladesh's garment sector is dominated by two powerful industry organizations, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers Export Association (BKMEA), whose membership together covers 6,304 of Bangladesh's approximately 7,304 garment factories. Neither association has any use for real unions. There are approximately 1,000 smaller unaffiliated garment factories, which tend to have worse conditions and greater violation of workers' rights than the BGMEA and BKMEA factories.

According to the Ministry of Labor in Bangladesh, there are some 215 garment factories that have some limited union presence, which would amount to just three percent of factories. **But when one counts the factories where workers have strong worker rights, freedom of association and collective bargaining, it appears that under 30 smaller garment factories, none of them affiliated to any of the major factory groups, respect these rights. This means that well under one half of one percent of Bangladeshi garment factories afford these rights.** So, at present in Bangladesh, there are under **30 good factories**, where

worker rights are fully respected and some **7,274 factories where workers rights are not respected.**

The garment workers in Bangladesh are some of the hardest workers in the world, and yet are some of the poorest. The highest wage for senior sewers is just 42 cents an hour, leaving workers forced to routinely work 60 hours a week just to survive.

This is where the **European Union**, the **United States** and **Canada** can intervene for the better. **The garment workers in Bangladesh desperately need the International Labour Organization standards:**

- Freedom of association,
- Right to organize,
- Right to form a union,
- Right to bargain collectively,
- Sustainable wages (negotiated with Bangladeshi unions), and
- An end to child labor.



# Appendix

## A. Wages in Bangladesh's Garment Industry

Garment Workers:      Helpers earn 33 cents an hour.  
                                  Junior Operators earn 37 cents an hour.  
                                  Senior Operators earn 42 cents an hour.

Helpers:                      33 cents an hour  
                                  \$2.64 a day (8-hour shift)  
                                  \$15.84 a week (6 days)  
                                  \$68.64 a month  
                                  \$823.68 a year  
                                  \* Overtime must be paid at double time, 66 cents an hour.  
                                  \* Overtime cannot exceed 12 hours per week and must be voluntary.

Junior Operators:        37 cents an hour  
                                  \$2.96 a day (8-hour shift)  
                                  \$17.76 a week (6 days)  
                                  \$76.96 a month  
                                  \$923.52 a year  
                                  \* Overtime must be paid at double time, 74 cents an hour.  
                                  \* Overtime cannot exceed 12 hours per week and must be voluntary.

Senior Operators:        42 cents an hour  
                                  \$3.36 a day (8-hour shift)  
                                  \$20.16 a week (6 days)  
                                  \$87.36 a month  
                                  \$1,048.32 a year  
                                  \* Overtime must be paid at double time, 84 cents an hour.  
                                  \* Overtime cannot exceed 12 hours per week and must be voluntary.

Senior workers who volunteer for 12 hours of overtime a week can earn 84 cents an hour and an additional \$10.08 for the week. With overtime added to her regular earnings of \$20.16 for the 48-hour workweek, she can earn a total of \$30.24 per week and \$131.04 a month.

(2014 data)



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## Appendix

### B. Some Examples of Garment Workers' Wages

<b>Country</b>	<b>Hourly Wage (USD)</b>
Sri Lanka	0.32
Bangladesh -helper	0.33
- senior worker	0.42
Vietnam	0.52
Jordan	0.72
Nicaragua	0.73
El Salvador	0.85
Honduras	1.24
Malaysia	1.36



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