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**REMARKS  
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DCCI, DHAKA  
SEPTEMBER 2, 2013**

Md. Sabur Khan, President, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Kazi Akram Uddin Ahmed, President, FBCCI

Bijon Kumar Baishya, Registrar of Joint Stock Companies

Businessmen and businesswomen ... the engines of the Bangladesh economy

Asalaam ‘malaikum and good afternoon

The man turned his head slowly toward me ...

His eyes, fierce and filled with fire, locked onto mine ...

He made no pretense to smile in common courtesy ...

He said through tight lips, “America will not buy shirts stained with the blood of Bangladeshi workers.”

Thus began my recent meeting with one of the most powerful leaders of the United States Congress.

Sustaining his grip on my eyes, he repeated, “America will not buy shirts stained with the blood of Bangladeshi workers ... that is my message ... .”

Thus ended my recent meeting with one of the most powerful leaders of the United States Congress.

The meeting was the shortest of my career ...

... but the message was clear and powerful. After the horrific disasters of the Tazreen Fashions fire and the Rana Plaza building collapse, “Enough!” There simply cannot be any more such

horrid disasters. The time has come to transform the apparel sector of Bangladesh. All of us ... owners, workers, government, buyers, international organizations, friends and partners of Bangladesh ... all of us must work together to ensure that the horrors of Tazreens Fashions and Rana Plaza are never repeated. Indeed, working together, we can transform Bangladesh's apparel sector.

To ensure that these tragedies have not been in vain, to ensure that these tragedies are never repeated, to ensure that Brand Bangladesh is a Preferred Brand, we must first understand the cause of these horrible, deadly disasters.

I believe these disasters were the result of greed, corruption and ignorance ...

... greed, corruption and ignorance in these two disasters snuffed out the lives of 1243 innocent Bangladeshi women and men who had sought nothing more than to provide a decent living for themselves and their families, injured and maimed hundreds more, many grievously and permanently, devastated thousands of Bangladeshi families, who had done no wrong, who had committed no offense.

Such is the legacy of unfettered greed, corruption and ignorance ...

... but from the ashes and crumbled concrete of these disasters arises a great hope ... a hope that these tragedies will mark an end to disasters in Bangladesh's apparel sector.

I share that hope.

I believe that these disasters will in fact bring about fundamental transformation of Bangladesh's apparel sector.

Some say that Bangladesh has had industrial tragedies in the past ... tragedies that elicited much handwringing but little tangible action to address the causes of such tragedies ... some say that the tragedies of Tazreen Fashions and Rana Plaza, too, will soon fade and be forgotten, that business as usual will soon return.

I think not.

I think there can be no return to business as usual ... I think there can be no resetting the clock to count down to the next horrible disaster ... and the next ... no ... these most recent tragedies must mark the end of an era when the lives and rights of Bangladeshi workers are put at risk and sometimes sacrificed ... working together, we can create a new era when workers' rights are respected, when workers can work in safe conditions, when tragic disasters are no more.

Bangladesh's apparel sector can and has transformed itself ... just look at the record. When last I lived in Bangladesh a dozen years ago, I worked on serious issues in the apparel sector such as child labor, padlocked exits, denied worker access to toilets, and unpaid overtime. Those problems now are largely, if not completely, eliminated, because that is what had to be done to preserve markets in America and Europe, to sustain and grow the apparel sector, which is to the

benefit of us all. Recognition of these realities led to rapid transformation of the sector on those fronts.

I believe the apparel sector is at a similar crossroads today. I believe the industry's markets and the industry's sustainability and continued strong growth could again be at serious risk. I believe the next Rana Plaza building collapse or the next Tazreen Fashions fire ... or the next ... could be the straw that breaks the proverbial camel's back as the world's largest and most reputable buyers forsake Bangladesh and take their business elsewhere.

Stakeholders in the apparel sector need to decide how to deal with fundamental issues of workers' rights to freely associate and organize, issues of fire safety, issues of factory structural soundness.

I believe stakeholders have a choice.

On one hand, they can deal forthrightly, aggressively, constructively in addressing and resolving these fundamental issues.

Or, on the other hand, stakeholders can take a minimalist approach, dealing with these critical issues reluctantly through half-hearted measures ... much talk and little action ... in the hope that the world will forget Tazreen and Rana Plaza, and the sector will return to business as usual.

Some stakeholders might prefer the second course of action, hoping that the world will forget as the clock ticks on. Some continue to oppose workers' rights to freely associate and organize and harass or fire workers who seek to create legitimate unions. Some create false unions to freeze out space for independent unions. I believe these backwards steps represent the thinking of a few, not the forward thinking of most stakeholders who seek to transform the sector to ensure that there is never again another Rana Plaza or Tazreen Fashions.

I know the apparel sector can transform itself; I know the apparel sector should transform itself; I know the apparel sector must transform itself; I believe the apparel sector will transform itself. I believe the apparel sector will choose a path that makes Brand Bangladesh a preferred brand, a brand that buyers and consumers want to buy, a brand that leads Bangladesh to becoming the largest exporter of apparel in the world, replacing China.

I believe the tragedies of Tazreen and Rana Plaza have generated unprecedented opportunity for transforming the apparel sector; I believe the stars are aligning as never before to help the sector eliminate forever the specter of such disaster; I believe stakeholders can/must/indeed will seize this opportunity.

--First, Bangladesh and its two biggest apparel markets, the US, and the EU, have adopted a Sustainability Compact, which identifies critical steps for addressing the issues of labor rights, fire safety and factory structural soundness. These steps include development of an effective inspection regimen to ensure compliance on these issues, creation of a publicly accessible database that posts inspection findings and required remedial actions, labor law reform to

improve the rights of workers, increased registration of independent trade unions, and extension of national labor law to the EPZs, including the prohibition on blacklisting workers.

--Second, when President Obama announced his decision to suspend Bangladesh's GSP privileges, he provided an action plan, a road map for reinstating these privileges. The GSP Action Plan, much like the Sustainability Compact, charts a course of concrete actions to help Bangladesh prevent any future disastrous fires and building collapses.

Third, for the first time ever, the brands ... the buyers ... are preparing to help manufacturers address work place safety issues. In Europe and in America, a total of over 100 companies have committed themselves through either the Accord or the Alliance to provide over \$80 million to support work place safety inspections in over 1500 factories. These same buyers are making available well over \$100 million in concessional loans to help owners undertake remedial actions to bring their factories up to standard.

--Fourth, the ILO is offering both technical advice and coordination to bring about agreement on uniform labor rights, fire safety and factory structural soundness standards, on standardized procedures for recruiting and training inspectors, on the conduct of inspections, on posting the results of inspections and required remedial actions on a publicly accessible data base. This \$20 million dollar program is already fully funded.

--Fifth, the ILO is in the final stage of determining whether conditions are satisfactory for launching a Better Work program, the largest in the history of the ILO, a program that ultimately would engage over 800 factories.

--Sixth, workers are endeavoring as never before to create independent trade unions to ensure that they, the workers, have a voice as the sector grows and flourishes.

--Seventh, but perhaps most important, the Government of Bangladesh is constructively committed and engaged in doing its part to bring about change in the apparel sector.

-- Meanwhile, Bangladesh's many friends, including the U.S., Canada, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, and the UK, among others, are offering significant resources and technical assistance to help Bangladesh seize this opportunity to get it right on labor rights, fire safety, and factory structural soundness.

Of course, this list goes on, but I think you can see how the stars are lining up for Bangladesh's apparel sector ... the challenge now is for the stakeholders to seize this opportunity, to embrace change and constructively address the fundamental issues of workers' rights, fire safety and factory structural soundness, thus setting the stage for Bangladesh's emergence as a preferred brand.

I am confident that the stakeholders, all the stakeholders will choose the path that makes Brand Bangladesh a mighty global brand, the best brand, the biggest brand, indeed, the brand of the world's largest exporter of apparel ... that is what I believe.

To that end, I commit myself, my mission, my government to do everything that we can to help Bangladesh's apparel sector lead the way in Bangladesh's becoming the next Asian Tiger.

Thank you.

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*\*As prepared for delivery.*