

EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

TEL: 880-2-883-7150-4

FAX: 880-2-9881677, 9885688

E-MAIL: DhakaPA@state.gov

WEBSITE: <http://dhaka.usembassy.gov>



REMARKS
BY
U.S. AMBASSADOR TO BANGLADESH DAN MOZENA
LAUNCH
“IT’S NOT ALL ABOUT THE PRICE TAG”
A DOCUMENTARY FILM OF THE READYMADE GARMENT
SECTOR
DHAKA REPORTERS UNITY
FEBRUARY 11, 2014

Honorable State Minister

Mufazzal Hossain ... maker of powerful films ... thank you for this great film!

... and all who support the strength and growth of the apparel industry to the benefit of the workers, the owners and the nation ...

Asalam ‘malaikum and good afternoon ...

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 Tazreen Fashions and Rana Plaza are never, never, never repeated. Indeed, working together we can transform Bangladesh’s apparel sector.

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 those words today with the same passion and fervor as I had when first I uttered them five months ago. I believe that Bangladesh truly could be/should be the world’s greatest exporter of apparel, bar none.

Indeed, since the monstrous Tazreen Fashions and Rana Plaza tragedies, Bangladesh’s apparel sector has taken some important steps down the path toward bringing the sector to international standards in terms of fire safety, factory structural soundness, and respect for workers’ rights to freely associate and organize.

On behalf of the government, the secretaries of Commerce, Labor and Foreign Affairs have given good leadership to efforts to bring the sector to international safety and labor standards. I vigorously applaud this strong government leadership to work with America, the European Union and other international friends of Bangladesh to use the GSP Restoration Action Plan and the Sustainability Compact as roadmaps for transforming the apparel sector so it can grow and prosper. Bangladesh has taken some steps following these roadmaps toward the shared goal of securing Bangladesh's role as a preferred supplier in the global RMG marketplace ... of securing the shared goal of creating millions more jobs and lifting millions more Bangladeshis out of poverty.

The international buyers, for the first time in history, have set aside traditional rivalries to forge two groupings to help Bangladesh's apparel sector meet world standards.

The International Labor Organization also supports the transformation of the sector by providing critical coordination to the disparate efforts to transform the sector and as it endeavors to engage those factories that are not suppliers to the buyer-members of the Accord or Alliance. This is augmented by the ILO's recently-launched Better Work Program, the largest in the ILO's history for improving working and labor conditions.

Labor rights have taken important steps forward. In marked contrast to 2012 and 2011, when only one union was registered each year, the government registered 90 bona fide new labor unions since January 2013... real unions ... real partners for advancing workers' safety and rights to the benefit of the industry and, of course, the workers themselves. These are the labor unions that are critical to bringing the sector to international standards.

Some of the factory owners have also contributed importantly to making Bangladesh's apparel sector a global model for competitiveness as they endeavor to ensure safe working conditions, respect for workers' rights, high productivity and good profitability. These owners are truly inspiring. I believe these forward-looking owners are key to transforming the apparel sector, and I believe their numbers are steadily growing.

I do not, however, diminish the obstacles and challenges that lie ahead ... they are many, and they are formidable.

Early this month, for example, in a meeting with government officials some factory owners made clear their opposition to bringing their factories to international standards for

worker safety and labor rights, claiming these standards are too high. To me, the unstated, but clear message from these owners was that since orders keep coming, since profits keep mounting, why should I incur additional costs in meeting these higher standards ... to me, the message seemed to be: “let’s go back to business as usual.” I believe “business as usual” is a recipe for more Tazreen Fashions and Rana Plaza tragedies, which will destroy prospects for Bangladesh’s apparel sector in the global marketplace. I call on all owners ... all owners ... to reject “business as usual” and to lead enthusiastically and creatively the transformation of the sector.

There are other challenges, too, such as recruiting, training, and deploying large corps of safety and labor inspectors, creating a publicly accessible database that shows inspection results in each factory, reforming and implementing the labor law and making it applicable to the EPZ’s, creating conditions in all factories so real and responsible unions ... unions that truly represent the workers ... can take root free of intimidation and recrimination to advance the industry by improving workers’ well-being, ... and there are certainly other challenges as well.

I believe the Bangladesh that I know ... the Bangladesh that is so energetic, dynamic, creative, generous, entrepreneurial, resilient ... will overcome all these challenges. I believe Bangladesh will choose and follow the path to transform the apparel sector and bring it to international safety and labor standards; I believe Bangladesh will become a model for other supplier countries to emulate; I believe Brand Bangladesh will become a Preferred Brand among consumers around the world; I believe Bangladesh can be the number one exporter of apparel in the world.

=====

**As prepared for delivery*