Women working in textile factory

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Remember the fight for garment workers' rights this May 1st

Greens/EFA working to ensure Rana Plaza tragedy is not repeated

The first of May recognised around the world as the International Workers' Day. On this day we acknowledge the crucial role of the worker in our societies and the need for stringent standards across our industries to ensure everyone has the right to work in a safe workplace. This May Day, we in the Greens/EFA want to highlight a group who are working in conditions that are often shocking and inhumane: garment workers.

Global garment-related trade is worth more than EUR 2.86 billion and employs over 75 million people, three quarters of whom are female. The garment sector supply chain is among those with the highest risk of violation of human rights and people's dignity.

Rana Plaza

On 23th April 2013, over 1,100 workers were killed and another 2,500 injured after the collapse of the Rana Plaza garment factory in Dhaka, Bangladesh. At the time the factory had been taking orders from big name brands such as Primark, Benetton, Matalan and Bon Marche, and its collapse was the deadliest garment-factory accident in history. Shockingly, it took many companies weeks to find out if they had been involved with the factory, despite their clothing labels being found in the rubble.

The lack of safety regulations and dangerous working conditions that led to the tragedy of Rana Plaza were no outlier. Right now many of the factories are guided by voluntary initiatives which recurrently overlap and don't close loopholes in the supply chain. They also fall short of effectively addressing human rights issues or of safeguarding minimum standards of environmental protection and social standards such as health and safety, wages, social security or working time, completely disregarding the most basic standards of both human rights on top of denying basic labour rights. What has become incredibly evident is that the garment industry does not have the necessary oversight to guarantee the wellbeing of its workers.

The work we're doing

As requested by the Greens, the Sanchez INI report on "EU Flagship Initiative on the Garment Sector" calls on the European Commission to propose legislation on the garment sector. These controls would be aligned with the new OECD guidelines on due diligence in the garment and foot-wear sector as well as OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, ILO resolution on decent work in supply chains and internationally agreed standards on human rights and social and environmental standards.

The Greens insisted on the right of workers to join and form a union and engage in collective bargaining, a right that is currently ignored by so many in the industry. It also stipulates that women's empowerment and children's rights must be a central focus of a Commission's legislative proposal, as we as Greens maintain that there is no place for child labour in our world.

This the adoption of this report was a huge victory for us and proved that the Greens can punch above our weight to put real pressure on the powers that be to make the world a better place. We will keep fighting both inside the European Parliament and outside to ensure that tragedies like Rana Plaza never happen again.

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