BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER (BPC) ISSUES JOINT LETTER COMMENDING ALLIANCE FOR BANGLADESH WORKER SAFETY ON ‘IMPRESSIVE’ RECORD

Alliance praised for efforts to protect, train and compensate workers; recommendations made for continued progress

Washington, D.C. (October 6, 2014) -- The Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety (Alliance) has made great progress toward protecting workers and improving garment factory safety, say former Senators George Mitchell (D-ME), Co-founder of the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC), and Olympia Snowe (R-ME), BPC Senior Fellow, in a letter issued by the BPC to Alliance Independent Chair Ellen Tauscher.

The BPC, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank actively promoting bipartisanship and respectful dialogue, helped give rise to the Alliance in 2013 through a series of discussions convened by Senators Mitchell and Snowe. The non-profit was instrumental in laying out the aggressive timeline and milestones for the Alliance’s five-year effort.

In the letter to Chair Ellen Tauscher, the Senators acknowledge that the Alliance had built “an impressive record of accomplishments in its first year of operation.” In particular, they commended the Alliance’s provision—in partnership with factory owners—of up to four months of wages to workers displaced by factory repairs, as well as the Alliance making affordable financing available for remediation.

“Factory workers should not be financially disadvantaged because their factory is undergoing remediation,” Sens. Mitchell and Snowe write. “The Alliance not only recognizes this fact, it has acted to protect workers.”

“We want to commend the Alliance for its efforts to address the need for financial assistance for the costs of factory remediation,” the letter states. “It is clear the Alliance continues to identify means for factory owners to access capital in a way that incentivizes the industry to invest in fire and safety improvements.”
The Senators specifically call out several additional Alliance achievements, including the development of a harmonized inspection standard in partnership with key stakeholders including the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) and the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh (Accord); the completion of all of Alliance factory inspections; the provision of safety training to more than one million factory workers; the administration of follow-up surveys to ensure training effectiveness; the establishment of a locally-operated helpline that empowers workers to raise safety concerns anonymously and without fear of reprisal; and engagement with the Bangladesh government to ensure that the country will be prepared to sustain these critical safety initiatives over the long term.

The Senators also recommend that the Alliance continue and expand its efforts in several key areas, included coordinating with other worker safety initiatives, surveying workers to determine training impact, expanding the worker helpline and continuing to engage closely with the Bangladesh government.

“The Alliance is strongly committed to ensuring factory safety, and to protecting and empowering Bangladesh garment workers,” said Alliance Independent Chair Ellen Tauscher. “We are pleased that leaders on both sides of the aisle recognize our progress to date in meeting our goals, achieving meaningful safety improvements and that they encourage the Alliance to continue its course of action. On behalf of the member companies of the Alliance, I pledge our continued commitment as we strive to create a safer and more sustainable future for the garment workers of Bangladesh.”

The full text of the letter can be found on the BPC website.

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About The Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety

The Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety was founded by a group of North American apparel companies, retailers and brands who joined together to develop and launch the Bangladesh Worker Safety Initiative, a binding, five-year undertaking that is transparent, results-oriented, measurable and verifiable with the intent of improving safety in Bangladeshi ready-made garment (RMG) factories. The Alliance provides global apparel companies and retailers the unprecedented opportunity to come together and put forward concrete solutions to issues that impact apparel and retail industries worldwide. More information about the Alliance can be found at www.bangladeshworkersafety.org.