



Hon. Sheikh Mohammed Belal  
Ambassador of Bangladesh to the Netherlands

**Call for the release of jailed trade unionists and labour activists**

16 February 2017

Your excellency,

As representatives of the Dutch trade unions FNV and CNV and the Clean Clothes Campaign, we are writing to you to express our deep concern over the detention of Trade Union leaders and workers in the garment industry. We are calling upon your government to immediately release all detained individuals and drop all charges against them. And we urgently request to substantially improve the rights of workers in general.

We strongly believe that the Bangladesh government and garment factory owners and employers have abused the non-violent strike for higher wages as an opportunity for a broad crackdown on the trade unions and others involved in the labour movement. Wages in Bangladesh's garment industry are among the lowest in the world. It is unacceptable that workers who demonstrate peacefully with the legitimate demand to increase the minimum wage are met with arbitrary detentions, the closure of union offices, the firing of well over 1,500 workers, police cases against 600 workers and trade union leaders, and ongoing threats and intimidation of union activists.

Garment workers in Bangladesh have the unequivocal right to join or form a union of their choosing and must be paid a living wage which allows them and their family a decent life. This right has already come under pressure over the last years, as we have observed an increase in retaliation and violence against workers seeking to organise in Bangladesh over the past years. This new crackdown does not affect only the detainees or the workers who have been suspended or fired, but all workers employed in or otherwise working on behalf of the garment industry.

Therefore, we urge the government to

- Immediately and unconditionally release the detained trade union leaders and activists
- Drop all related criminal cases
- Stop harassment of trade union offices; re-open closed trade union offices
- Guarantee the fundamental right of workers to join or form a union of their choice, as stipulated in the ILO declaration on the fundamental rights and principles at work 1998
- Start a review of the current mandatory minimum wage and increase it up to a living wage level

Yours sincerely,

Coen van der Veer  
Treasurer, FNV

Arend van Wijngaarden  
Vice-President, CNV

Christa de Bruin  
Coordinator Clean Clothes Campaign the Netherlands

Shirley Schijvens  
Owner Schijvens Confectiefabriek Hilvarenbeek B.V.