

July 22, 2014

Richard P. Appelbaum
MacArthur Chair in Sociology and Global & International Studies
University of California at Santa Barbara

Dear Professor Appelbaum,

We are writing in response to your June 13, 2014 follow-up critique of our report on the apparel supply chain in Bangladesh.¹

Our report outlines a complex, non-transparent, and poorly understood system for sourcing garments in a country with very weak governance. We conclude that multiple factors contribute to poor workplace safety for workers across the sector: the sourcing and production practices of global and national companies, as well as government regulatory and tax policies, weak enforcement of labor law, and lack of investment in infrastructure.

The report provides new insight into the link between business practices, weak respect for workers' rights, and significant factory safety risks. We highlight the important role of brands and retailers as key drivers of poor working conditions and recommend changes in their business practices and that they provide additional funding for factory upgrades.

Our findings about indirect sourcing practices are the result of a yearlong investigation, including new documentary evidence, review of publicly available information, and interviews with more than 100 people. We respectfully disagree that our presentation of new information about the non-transparent and pervasive practice of subcontracting represents an overemphasis in our focus.

With respect to the Accord and the Alliance, we stand by our assessment that the initiatives are more similar than they are different, and that neither goes far enough in addressing the full scope of the problem. We do not yet see a clear path forward in either initiative for a fair and transparent system for funding the factory repairs identified as necessary by their inspection programs.

Upgrading the garment sector in Bangladesh will require a shift in sourcing practices by global brands and their primary suppliers, as well as investments in a comprehensive approach to factory repairs and infrastructure by global and national companies, the government of Bangladesh, foreign governments, and international development organizations. We remain focused on real solutions to the serious challenges of ensuring workplace safety and respect for workers' rights in a global supply chain.

Sincerely,

Sarah Labowitz
Co-director and Research Scholar

Dorothee Baumann-Pauly
Research Director

¹ Available at: http://www.stern.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/assets/documents/con_047408.pdf