



## Enough is Enough – Stop these Murders at Workplaces in Asia

The Asian Network for the Rights of Occupational and Environmental Victims (ANROEV) is deeply saddened and outraged at the recent industrial disasters in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Within a spate of 8 months more than 1300 workers have died and the toll is still rising as the bodies are being pulled out of the Rana Plaza. Just when this statement is being written there is one more fire in a garment factory in Bangladesh killing more than 7 people.

ANROEV being a victims' network, spread in more than 14 Asian countries, was bonded together by two similar devastating fires in Thailand and China two decades back. Thus ANROEV fully understands the pain and agony that the victims and their families are facing and would like to express deep solidarity with the affected workers and their families. It is very unfortunate – as we are observing the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kader fire, which stood as the worst industrial fire for about 19 years, till the recent industrial disasters in Karachi and Dhaka. They have opened the old wounds again and this time more painful. History keeps on repeating in gruesome way.

ANROEV members also express their deep outrage at the colossal loss of life, which is now unprecedented by any scale. Fire and structural safety of the buildings is the basic right that workers in Asia rightfully deserve. Providing safe fire passage is well known for more than a century since the 'Triangle Fire' of New York in 1911 and if it is not provided or remains blocked any deaths henceforth should amount to 'murder' and not just an accident

Events of the last 8 months have clearly demonstrated a complete failure of the CSR and hollowness of the 'self-regulatory' standards and industry audits that manufactures and brands have been adopting in collusion with states. It has led to the weakening of the state regulatory mechanisms, which otherwise could have allowed inspections of these facilities by local authorities and thus disasters could have been prevented. It has also shown the failure of both for profit and nonprofit social auditing, that seems to be detached from the realities at ground.

Ironically, majority of the post-disaster proposals include the same failed and discredited CSR approach and corporate led top down proposals that tends to privatize what should be 'state' function like setting up of strong labour laws, OSH regulations including building codes and enforcing them.

At this point we also need to understand the underlying causes that include:

- The Economic model of neo-liberal development that systematically dismantles the local institutions of regulation and liberates brands and businesses both local and multinational to operate not only without accountability but with unprecedented impunity.

- Blood 'quest' for profits by the major clothing brands and retailers come at the cost of workers' life and health. The price of clothes does not reflect the real cost of the production, damage to environment and health of workers and communities. These costs are borne by the workers, their families and the communities, sometimes for many generations.
- Lack of governments in the region to fulfill the responsibility to protect their citizens by failing to enforce present laws and criminally prosecuting the businesses who kill workers at workplaces.
- Anti-union practices and lack of freedom of association that have kept the workplaces virtually union free. With limited bargaining power workers find it difficult to change the condition at work
- Levels of poverty among the workers that forces them to work in dangerous environment so that they can feed their families.

The network therefore demands:

1. Immediate fair compensation to all the victims and their families and proper long term rehabilitation for all the affected workers and their families.
2. Free and independent enquiry into root causes of the accident, which should lead to long term structural changes that includes building/strengthening of the local democratic institutions, making them accountable to the workers and people and allows for the progressive taxing of the industry that fund these institutions.
3. Criminal prosecution of all the responsible parties – including the owner, buyers for their negligence and auditors that 'certified' the premises as safe.

### **Henceforth**

1. Companies should be obliged to comply with national and international health and safety measures, whichever is a higher standard, in a serious manner through which should be monitored locally by strengthening the local independent inspections
2. Union and workers participation at all levels in health and safety policies and decisions has to be recognized as indispensable component in ensuring safe and healthy workplaces. Concrete steps should be taken to ensure freedom of association.
3. Active formation and recognition of victims' organizations as legitimate representatives of the injured and dead workers