

Make Trade Work for Workers

Dhaka Declaration

of the

Trade Unions

of the

**Ready-made Garments Manufacturing Industry
of Bangladesh**

Appeal to the Honorable Trade Ministers

of the LDCs

in the

Second Ministerial Meeting of the LDCs

Bangladesh Apparel Workers Federation

Bangladesh Garments Shramik Kormochari Federation

Bangladesh Garments Workers and Employees Federation

Bangladesh Independent Garments Workers Unions' Federation

Bangladesh Jatio Garments Shramik Kormochari League

Bangladesh Textile and Garments Workers League

Garments, Tailors Workers League

National Garments Workers and Employees Federation

National Garments Workers Federation

Nationalist Garments Workers Federation

Shadhin Bangla Garments Shramik Federation

Dhaka, 1 June 2003

Make Trade Work for the Workers

Dhaka Declaration of the Trade Unions of the Ready-made Garments Sector

We, the trade union activists of the ready-made garments manufacturing industry of Bangladesh, extend our warm welcome to the honorable Commerce Ministers of the LDCs, who have gathered in Dhaka for the auspicious occasion of the 2nd Ministerial Conference of the LDCs.

While the honorable ministers of the LDCs sit to decide the unified position of the LDCs in the upcoming WTO Ministerial Conference in Cancun, the 1.2 million female workers of the ready-made garments industry of Bangladesh are living under the imminent threat of losing their job and entitlement to livelihood in the face of liberalization process initiated by the WTO.

Honorable Ministers:

Trade and the issue of market access should not be seen only from the perspective of commerce and commercial gains. Millions of workers of Dhaka city, the host of the second Ministerial Conference of the LDCs, consider trade as a concern of livelihood. We call upon the honorable Ministers to consider and reflect the concerns of the workers in the Dhaka Declaration expected from the successful completion of the Conference.

Distinguished Leaders:

The trade issues and interests of business circles may vary across the LDCs but the interest of the workers of the LDCs is centered on a single issue of livelihood security. The female workers of the ready-made garments sector in Bangladesh win bread for at least 6 million dependents. The female workers have come a long way to win their livelihood and empowerment. The female workers of this sector are apprehensive that the phasing out of MFA may lead to loss of 80% employment in the ready-made garments sector of Bangladesh. The workers' representatives stress that the market of the Bangladesh's export of ready-made garments needs to be retained at any cost. Otherwise, a grave human catastrophe will devastate Bangladesh.

Eminent Statesmen:

We rely on your wisdom and moral standing and thereby hope that you would not let any commercial concern overshadow the workers' rights to life and livelihood. The Dhaka Declaration of the trade union activists of the ready-made garments manufacturing industry of Bangladesh put forward the following appeal to the honorable Ministers with a call to "*Make Trade Work for the Workers.*"

Make Trade Work for the Workers

Appeal to the Honorable Trade Ministers of the LDCs

We, the trade union activists of the ready-made garments manufacturing industry of Bangladesh, take this opportunity to welcome the honorable Commerce Ministers of the LDCs to Dhaka on the occasion of the 2nd Ministerial Conference of the LDCs. On behalf of the 1.2 million female garments workers of Bangladesh and their 6 million dependents we appeal to you on the following concerns.

We strongly urge the LDC Ministers to include the concerns of the workers in the Dhaka Declaration, and to:

1. Call on the WTO to enact immediate and unconditional measures to ensure and expand the market access of the exports of the LDCs (including ready-made garments) to the developed countries.
2. Put forward the issue in the WTO forum to identify and revise/exclude all the rules of the WTO that negatively affect the livelihood of the workers of the LDCs.
3. Call on the WTO to assess and identify the actual and potential loss of employment of the workers in the LDCs in the face of the WTO led liberalization process, and accordingly implement a specific plan to mobilize and extend compensation to the workers.
4. Call on the WTO to ensure that the unskilled and semi-skilled workers of the LDCs (specially in those sectors, such as the ready-made garments sector of Bangladesh, which may experience retrenchment due to the WTO led liberalization) have free and equitable access to the job market of the developed economies.

We also urge the honorable Commerce Ministers of the LDCs to:

5. Take appropriate initiatives in their respective countries to realize the workers' rights as assured under the ILO Convention.

Make Trade Work for the Workers

Appeal to the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

We, the trade union activists of the ready-made garments manufacturing industry of Bangladesh, appeal to the government through the honorable Commerce Minister *Mr. Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury* to:

1. Put forward the livelihood concerns of the female workers of the ready-made garments sector in the 2nd Ministerial Conference of the LDCs.
2. Design and implement a viable plan to retain and expand the national ready-made garments manufacturing sector by promoting backward linkage sectors and prospect of higher value addition.
3. Set up a legal and administrative framework to keep aside five percent of net export earning of the ready-made garments sector to constitute a workers' welfare fund. Only through such measures trade can benefit the poor.
4. Take measures to ensure the trade union rights of the female garments workers.
5. Refrain from signing any trade agreement that negatively affects the livelihood of 1.2 million female garments workers and nearly 6 million dependents of these workers. The same position has to be reflected in the LDC declaration and during the upcoming Cancun Ministerial Conference of WTO.

We, the trade union activists, are with the government in every step of the way to make trade work for the workers, and we firmly believe that the government headed by the honorable Prime Minister **Begum Khaleda Zia** would reciprocate in a similar fashion.