

News Release

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Joint Statement on the Second Anniversary of the Rana Plaza Disaster in Bangladesh

WASHINGTON — The text of the following statement was released by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry; High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini; U.S. Secretary of Labor Thomas E. Perez; EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility Marianne Thyssen; U.S. Trade Representative Michael B. G. Froman; EU Commissioner for Trade Cecilia Malmström; U.S. Agency for International Development Acting Administrator Alfonso E. Lenhardt; and EU Commissioner in charge of International Cooperation and Development Neven Mimica.

"Today we mark the passage of two years since the tragic collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Dhaka, Bangladesh, that claimed over 1,100 lives and injured many more. We join the people of Bangladesh in mourning those who lost their lives and remain mindful of the difficult struggle for those who survived.

In the aftermath of the Rana Plaza collapse, the European Union, the United States and the International Labor Organization (ILO) joined with Bangladesh to undertake a series of significant commitments to foster respect for fundamental labor rights and ensure worker safety and health in the garment sector. The Partners announced the Sustainability Compact for Bangladesh — a statement of principles and commitments designed to bring about a lasting transformation in the sector.

"Today, on the commemoration of the Rana Plaza collapse, we take note of the progress that has been made, but also the urgent work that remains.

"Over the past two years, the government of Bangladesh has amended its Labor Law to strengthen certain aspects of freedom of association, collective bargaining and occupational health and safety; recruited and begun training a significant number of new factory inspectors; started fire and structural safety assessments and begun posting online factory safety information; established a hotline to report labor concerns; and since January 2013, registered approximately 300 new trade unions. Similarly, we applaud the completion by the two private sector initiatives, the Accord and the Alliance, of their efforts to assess the structural and fire safety of over 2,000 RMG factories, the related closure of over 30 factories that posed the greatest risk of catastrophic failure, and remedial actions taken so far.

"However, significant work remains to be done under the Sustainability Compact to realize its goals. In particular, we encourage and support the Government of Bangladesh's efforts to continue reforming its labor laws, in close consultations with the ILO, complete the safety inspections of all RMG factories and continue to register unions in a timely and transparent way. We urge the government to issue — without further delays — the implementing rules for Bangladesh Labor Act, consistent with international labor standards. Similarly, we call upon the Government of Bangladesh to enact legislation on economic processing zones that ensures workers inside the zones enjoy rights commensurate with those outside the zones.

"Also of pressing concern, the government should respond swiftly to cases of unfair labor practices, violence, and harassment against trade unions and workers' representatives. We note that advances in health, safety, and labor rights will remain fragile and impermanent if workers are unable to exercise those rights and organize to represent their interests and concerns.

"Our commitment to Bangladesh is strong and enduring. The European Union and the United States, in close cooperation with the ILO, will remain closely engaged with the Government of Bangladesh in the spirit of partnership to continue our work together to ensure that economic growth and sustainable development go hand-in-hand with workers' safety and rights."