



INTERNATIONAL LABOR RIGHTS FORUM

1634 I St NW, Suite 1001, Washington, DC 20006

Board of Directors

Cameron Duncan

President

Eric Dirnbach

Vice President

Christopher Townsend

Secretary

Arturo Alcalde Justiniani

John Cavanagh

Rini Chakraborty

May Chen

Lance Compa

Bill Fletcher

Judy Gearhart

Ken Grossinger

Sarita Gupta

Mark Harrison

Yvette Pena-Lopes

Katie Quan

Carol Rosenblatt

Omar Salazar

Kailash Satyarthi

Rep. Jan Schakowsky

Daniel Smith

Advisory Council

Peggy Billings

Robin Broad

Anita Chan

Audrey Chapman

Steve Charnovitz

Sarah Cleveland

Terry Collingsworth

Keith Geiger

Jim Hightower

John H. Hovis

Kjeld Jakobsen

Somsak Kosaisook

Atherton Martin

Mughtar Pakpahan

Senator Bernie Sanders

Robert White

Ray Marshall

President Emeritus

Bishop Jesse DeWitt

President Emeritus

On June 16, 2010, Mr. Islam was detained by officials of Bangladesh's National Intelligence Service (NSI). According to Mr. Islam, he was threatened with death and subjected to severe and repeated beatings in coercion to give false testimony against his colleagues at BCWS. He said: "[The NSI officers] started beating me with a wooden stick, a thick, hard stick. They were hurting my joints, targeting my arm, knee, and ball-joints. [He] ordered me to do what his boss said and provide a written statement according to their demands. 'Otherwise we will kill you,' he yelled... Suddenly one of them

Via electronic mail and facsimile

April 11, 2012

Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina
Old Sangsad Bhaban
Tejgaon, Dhaka-1215
Bangladesh

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing on behalf of the International Labor Rights Forum to express our very deep alarm regarding the torture and murder of Aminul Islam, a labor rights advocate affiliated with the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS). The circumstances raise concerns of involvement by Bangladeshi security forces.

International Labor Rights Forum is a U.S. non-governmental organization that promotes just and humane treatment for workers worldwide. ILRF connects policy makers and activists to workers' struggles around the world, promoting more equitable trade policy and legal protections against child and forced labor, discrimination of all kinds, and infringements on workers' right to organize and bargain collectively. BCWS is one of Bangladesh's leading labor rights organizations and has demonstrated professionalism and effectiveness in advancing lawful means of redressing violations of worker rights and in so doing has contributed in significant ways to compliance with the rule of law in Bangladesh. Levi Strauss & Co. has called BCWS "a globally respected... organization that has played a vital role in documenting and working to remedy labor violations in the apparel industry in Bangladesh."

Mr. Islam went missing from Ashulia on the city outskirts on April 4, 2012, and his body was found on the highway near Ghatail Police Station a day later. According to local police reports, Mr. Islam's body bore signs of brutal torture. The incident has been documented by Human Rights Watch in a letter to you on April 11, 2012.

The killing of Mr. Islam represents only the latest in an ongoing series of infringements on the ability of BCWS staff to carry out its vital work of advocating for the rights of apparel workers. This includes documented acts which have been carried out with the open involvement of state security officials.

kicked my head and I lost consciousness... When I became conscious they again ordered me to give them a written statement against BCWS. They beat me when I refused them. This continued for a long time. They kept threatening they would kill me by crossfire, or beat me until I bleed to death.” Mr. Islam’s full statement on the incident is recorded in *Enemies of the Nation or Human Rights Defenders? Fighting Poverty Wages in Bangladesh*, published by SweatFree Communities in November of 2010 and available at <http://www.sweatfree.org/docs/enemiesofthenation.pdf> .

Also documented in the report is the August 2010 arrest and imprisonment of two of Mr. Islam’s colleagues at BCWS, Kalpona Akter and Babul Akhter, on charges of fomenting riots and related acts during a period of worker demonstrations for a higher minimum wage. A year and a half later, still no evidence has been presented to the defendants or their lawyers that indicate the three were involved in any of the incidents for which they are charged. The imprisonment of BCWS staff drew the attention of and action by members of the U.S. Congress. Via SweatFree.org, LaborRights.org, Change.org, and at universities, churches, union halls, and conferences, we have generated a total of over 110,000 signatures by people of conscience expressing outrage at the continuation of the fabricated criminal charges against BCWS staff. Nonetheless, Ms. Akter, Mr. Akhter, and many others continue to face trials (as did Mr. Islam until his death) for ten of the original eleven cases.

It is also concerning that the killing of Mr. Islam follows the airing last month of *ABC News* report on national television in the United States about the deadly garment factory fires that have killed more than 500 Bangladeshi workers in recent years, and the repression of labor rights advocates who have encouraged reform of the industry’s practices.

Unless the persons responsible for Mr. Islam’s brutal murder and torture are held accountable, and the policies and practices that give rise to such abuses are ended, this incident will negatively impact Bangladesh’s standing, in the eyes of not only labor rights advocates and consumers of clothing produced in Bangladesh, but also international buyers and other governments, as a location for export garment manufacturing. Because garment manufacturing is a vital source of employment for working people in Bangladesh, such consequences should be avoided.

Therefore, the International Labor Rights Forum is calling on our network of labor rights advocates and other persons of conscience in the United States and abroad to join us in strongly urging your government to conduct a comprehensive and impartial investigation of the disappearance, torture, and murder of Aminul Islam, and report the findings publicly; to take effective measures to ensure the physical safety of all labor rights advocates, especially Mr. Islam’s colleagues, Kalpona Akter and Babul Akhter; and immediately withdraw the charges against Ms. Akter, Mr. Akhter, and all others who have been facing unsubstantiated criminal charges in retaliation for advocating for workers’ rights.

We request that your government inform us as soon as possible of the steps which it is taking in this regard. We will appreciate your prompt attention to this deeply troubling matter.

Sincerely,



Judy Gearhart
Executive Director

cc: Human Rights Commission
The Chairman
Fax: 88-02-8333219
Email: chairman@nhrc.org.bd

Ministry of Commerce
The Secretary
Government of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh
Fax : 88-02-7165741
Email: secretary@mincom.gov.bd

Ministry of Labour and Employment
The Honorable Minister
Govt. of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh
Bangladesh Secretariat
Dhaka, Bangladesh
Fax: 88-02-7160688
Email: info@mole.gov.bd

Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA)
Major Gen. ATM Shahidul Islam, ndc, psc
Executive Chairman
Fax: 880-2-9661849
E-mail: info@bepza.org

Bangladesh Ambassador to the US
His Excellency Akramul Qader, Ambassador
Embassy of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
3510 International Drive NW, Washington DC 20008
Fax: 202-244-2771
Email: akuqader@hotmail.com