

# **The Cost of Cheap Clothes: Globalization and Female Garment Labor in Bangladesh**

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# **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

## **Article 23**

- Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work, and to protection against unemployment.
- Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work
- Everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family the existence worthy of human dignity...
- Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

# **Bangladesh 2<sup>nd</sup> Largest Readymade Garment Industry**

- Second Largest Readymade Garment after China
- \$20 billion+ revenue stream for the government
- Unregulated growth of the industry

# Readymade Garment Workers in Bangladesh



# Demographics

- 4 million workers in the ready-made garment
- Industry
- Poised to grow to 10 million workers in 8-10 years
- Women form 80% of the workforce
  - Ages 15-35, poor, rural migrants, low levels of literacy, lack of knowledge about health and nutrition

# Work Conditions Before 2013

- \$30 base pay
- Workers fired for joining trade unions
- Death-trap factories
- Long work days 10-12 hours
- Workers locked inside the factory
- Lack of fire escapes, water sprinklers in factories, locked doors and windows
- Workers trapped inside factories during fires

# The Cost of a Tee Shirt





# US Retailers





# Workers on Their Way to Work



# Gap, Walmart, Joe Fresh





# Bangladesh Factory Collapse

## April 24, 2013









# 17-Year-Old Woman With an Artificial Limb



# Mothers with Pictures of their Missing Daughters





# Mental Health



# Garment Industries

- Grew in the 1990s to 2000s
- 5,000 factories; many poorly regulated
- Urban and peri-urban areas
- Factories owned by Chinese, Korean, Indian and Bangladeshis

# Workers' Demands

- Basic pay to \$100 a month
  - Raised to \$67
- On time payments
- Holiday Bonus
- Healthcare
- Housing
- Childcare
- Paid leave for illness

# Factories in an Urban Area



# Where Do they Live?



# **Agents not Victims**

- These women are not victims; they are trying to craft new lives
- They have become victimized due to their poverty, exploitation by manufacturers and retailers, and an indifferent state
- Read articles online; become an informed consumer



- Mahatma Gandhi

“Be the change you  
want to see in the  
world.”