

BHRRC Invitation to comment on the Bangladesh Accord and the report “Unfinished Businesses: Outstanding safety hazards at garment factories show that the Accord must be extended and expanded”

May 20, 2021

We are, and remain, strongly committed to continued systematic efforts to ensure that further improvements are made, in Bangladesh and other markets in regards to fire, electrical and building safety. Working on the ground in Bangladesh, it has been evident to us that the work done within the Accord has made a significant and positive impact on workers’ safety.

When the transition Accord was signed in 2018, it was agreed by signatory brands and trade unions that after the agreement ends in May 31, 2021, work will be handed over to a national regulatory body who would take over the work thereafter. As part of this transition, in May 2020, the Accord operations in Bangladesh were transferred to the then newly founded RMG Sustainability Council (RSC). This is a Bangladesh not-for-profit organization with tripartite governance structures and equal representation on the board of directors of international brands, trade unions and suppliers. This RSC adopted all Accord standards, compliance, protocols and articles.

We are committed to supporting the RSC, to continue driving improvements in safety standards in the entire textile industry in Bangladesh, not only the factories producing for H&M Group. The unions also have an extremely important role in driving this agenda through the RSC, where they are an equal partner with Brands and the industry.

In addition to our commitments to the RSC, we understand the ask that the Unions have with regards to direct brand accountability. Our Global Framework Agreement with IndustriALL and IF Metall is based on the shared belief that good industrial relations and equal partnerships are crucial for lasting improvements for garment workers. We, as part of the brand negotiating team, are in close dialogue with IndustriAll and UNI on how to enable this with relations to a follow-on agreement of the transition Accord. We remain committed to finding a solution. We have a strong common ground here with unions, and agree on key principles of accountability, tri-partite structures and local inclusion.

H&M Group only produces in factories that have been reviewed by the Accord. When we start working with factories, fire exits, fire alarms and fire extinguishers are examples of fundamental safety mechanisms that must be in place in order for them to be allowed to produce goods for H&M Group.

The numbers referred to in the report “Unfinished business” do not mean that factories lack these safety mechanisms. It can rather refer to the fact that these mechanisms are in need of maintenance or do not have adequate size according to international safety standards. Some of the issues stated in the report have already been corrected, but due to lockdowns and fewer factory visits because of COVID-19, the Accord has not been able to verify these corrections. We will of course support our suppliers to correct pending matters. Regardless of any future decision about organisation or governance of the Accord, our position on and commitment to this extremely important area will stand.