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PRESS RELEASE

Forensic video evidence filed in legal action against German retailer

Factory fire at KiK supplier in Pakistan: minor fire safety improvements could have saved lives

Berlin, 1 February 2018 – A few more exits, accessible stairways and clearly signposted escape routes: a couple of changes would have been enough to save many lives in the fire that destroyed the Ali Enterprises textile factory on 11 September 2012 in Karachi, Pakistan. Inadequate fire safety measures at the company, a supplier for the German clothes retailer KiK, led to the agonizing deaths of 260 factory workers in the blaze. This is shown by a new computer simulation from Goldsmiths, University of London's Forensic Architecture project. The simulation has now been submitted to the Regional Court in Dortmund, Germany, where legal action against KiK is ongoing. Since March 2015 the Court has been examining a civil claim against KiK filed by four Pakistanis – one survivor and three relatives of workers killed in the fire – with support from the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) and medico international.

"KiK knew or should have known about the structural details if, as they claim, their representatives visited the factory several times," explains Miriam Saage-Maaß from ECCHR. "As the supplier's main client, KiK could have easily demanded improvements to fire safety measures. It never did so. As a result KiK bears part of the responsibility for the 260 deaths." KiK, she says, cannot rely on the safety certificates awarded to the Pakistani factory. "Everyone in the textile industry knows that certificates of safety and working conditions in global supply chains aren't worth the paper they are written on," says Thomas Seibert from medico international.

The 18 minute video from Forensic Architecture details the lack of stairs, emergency exits, fire extinguishers and fire alarms in the factory. Using photos, videos and witness testimonies, the forensic experts reconstructed the exact dimensions, architecture and layout of the building and simulated the events on the night of the fire. In consultation with international fire safety experts they also simulated how the fire would have progressed if better safety measures had been in place. Based on this information and analysis, the Forensic Architecture team comes to a clear conclusion: small changes in fire safety precautions would have drastically reduced the impact of the fire.

For more see: Paying the price for clothing production in South Asia

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