

## **Pakistani factory struck by fire believed to supply European market**

- ^ Clean Clothes Campaign calls on brands sourcing from Pakistan to undertake immediate reviews of their suppliers.
- ^ Ali Enterprises reportedly supplied the European market.
- ^ CCC warns that similar disasters could happen again if the root causes of these fires are not addressed urgently.

Information emerging from Pakistan today suggests that the Ali Enterprise factory in Karachi, which burned down on Tuesday killing over 300 workers, was supplying goods to the European market. The Clean Clothes Campaign is now calling on all brands and retailers sourcing from Karachi to undertake immediate reviews of all their suppliers.

Fire ripped through two different factories , killing over 300 workers on what unions have described as the 'darkest day in the history of the Pakistan labour movement'. Pakistani unions are now calling for the arrest of the factory owner of Ali Enterprises. Demands are also being made for government officials who have acted negligently to be prosecuted.

Early reports suggest between 650 and 1000 workers were working in the Ali Enterprises factory at the time the fire broke out. There was no fire fighting equipment inside the factory. The high death toll has been attributed to the fact that workers were trapped inside the factory. Only one fire exit was available, windows on most of the floors were barred and stairways were blocked. A number of workers were killed jumping from windows. It is believed many more workers died of suffocation in the basement after it became flooded with water. Unions say identification of the dead workers has been hindered by the fact that workers did not have a contract.

The National Trade Union Federation in Karachi state that although the high death toll at Ali Enterprises had led to extensive coverage of the fire, this is not an isolated incident but a regular occurrence in an industry that is poorly regulated and largely non unionised.

CCC also insists that the fire follows a pattern of negligence occurring not just in Pakistan but throughout the garment industry. Brand and retailers must therefore take more action to address the root causes of such disasters. In March, CCC together with Bangladeshi and international trade unions and labour rights groups signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the US based company PVH (owner of Tommy Hilfiger and Calvin Klein) concerning Bangladesh, whose industry has suffered from a spate of similar fires involving brands such as H&M, Zara and GAP. The agreement provides for independent inspections, training, and workers committees on health and safety issues.

Brands and retailers need to take responsibility for improving conditions, enforcing international labour standards and need to work with worker representatives to address safety issues in every country they source from if future tragedies are to be avoided.

Please sign the petition to make factories safe!

[http://www.labourstartcampaigns.net/show\\_campaign.cgi?c=1570](http://www.labourstartcampaigns.net/show_campaign.cgi?c=1570)

**Additional information:**

**Information on the fire at Ali Enterprises**

Early reports suggest around 600 workers were working in the Ali Enterprises factory at the time the fire broke out. The factory was unregistered and was operating without proper safety permits. There was no fire fighting equipment inside the factory. The high death toll has been attributed to the fact that workers were trapped inside the factory. Only one fire exit was available, windows on most of the floors were barred and stairways were blocked. A number of workers were killed jumping from windows. It is believed many more workers died of suffocation in the basement after it became flooded with water.

Unions say identification of the dead workers has been hindered by the fact that workers were employed through agents and none have been given either a contract or an appointment letter. None of the workers who were employed were registered for social security.

Workers at the factory had been unable to join a trade union, preventing them from challenging the poor conditions at the factory. The repression of trade union rights exacerbates the impact of disasters such as this, denying workers themselves the possibility to challenge unsafe conditions.

In Pakistan the use of anti terrorism charges against trade union activists is a current strategy for repressing their activity. On 14th September the next hearing for 12 union activists from the All Ittehad Power Loom Mazdoor Union (PLMU), who are being tried at the anti terrorist court for on bribery charges after organising loom workers at Al Karam Textile Mills, will take place. This follows another recent case where 6 textile workers were prosecuted for a total of 460 years on similar charges.