

February 27, 2018

Answers by the Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation to:

Parliamentary Questions by the member Alkaya (Socialist Party) to the Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation on abuses in the Indian garment industry [submitted January 31, 2018]

Question 1

Do you know the report *Labour Without Liberty - Female Migrant Workers in Bangalore's Garment Industry?* ⁽¹⁾

Answer 1

Yes.

Question 2

How do you view the fact that two years after the publication of an earlier report on poor labour conditions in Bangalore and the investigations by various garment brands, plans for improvement are still in the making?

Answer 2

As also expressed in the report '*Labour without Liberty*', a number of brands have taken measures since the previous report. For instance, C & A and two other international brands work together to investigate and tackle abuses in the region. They developed a project for migrant workers. The ideas/concepts for this project are shared with the Textile Covenant and with local trade unions. C & A also launched a program that trains suppliers in having a good relationship with their employees. As a result, one Bangalore supplier transferred the management of his hostel to a local specialised welfare organisation.

However, the development of plans for improvement in the production countries, as part of the due diligence process, takes time. It requires international cooperation with various companies and social organisations. It is important that the companies involved keep in contact with local stakeholders about the progress.

In order to further address the abuses mentioned in the report, it would generally help garment brands if the names of the researched production sites were made known. In that way, garment brands can work towards solutions in dialogue with their suppliers. In the case of the Dutch companies covered by the Covenant, it was possible to speak to the investigated producers through mediation of the textile covenant secretariat and to bring the covenant companies into contact with those who commissioned the report. After all, the secretariat of the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (SER) is authorised to pass on – on a confidential basis – signals of problems at production sites to the covenant companies who purchase there.

Question 3

Can you indicate whether the signing of the Sustainable Garment and Textile Covenant by the brands mentioned in the report (like C&A) has already resulted in better due diligence by these brands? If so, how can these kinds of abuses still occur in the (production) chain?

Answer 3

The participating companies in the Covenant have taken steps in the process of *due diligence* in the past year and a half. In the summer of 2017, almost all 57 companies submitted their plan of action, in which they explain how they have set up the process of due diligence. Moreover, the publication of the production locations is an important result. This enables employees in factories and involved organisations to submit complaints to purchasing brands via the SER secretariat.

The government expects the participating companies to start tackling the most urgent risks in accordance with the OECD guidelines. In the textile covenant, child labour and living wages are identified as risks that companies can only tackle together. For this, projects are developed together with the other Covenant parties. These projects start in a number of countries, including India.

Reports such as '*Labour without Liberty*' keep companies and other Covenant parties sharply aware of the risks that are present (further) in the chain and that deserve attention.

Question 4

Do you share the opinion that the Sustainable Garment and Textile Covenant should lead to the prevention of these abuses by the garment brands and importers? If so, what are you going to do to realise this?

Answer 4

At the instigation of the government, the Covenant was indeed set up with the aim to achieve within three to five years substantial steps of improvement on specific ICSR risks within the production chain of Dutch garment and textile companies for groups that experience negative consequences of garment production. Within the Covenant NGOs, trade unions and the government cooperate to prevent abuses in the textile sector. Parties of the Covenant, for example, developed the non-discrimination guide for Dutch companies. This guide also pays attention to the issue of migrants in the Indian textile sector.

However, the scope of the Covenant is limited. Dutch textile companies are, with one percent of the world trade, a small player on the world market. Problems can often only be tackled effectively in collaboration with other companies and parties. For this reason, the Covenant promotes joint activities and projects through European and international cooperation. On 30 January 2018, the Dutch Covenant and the German *Textilbündnis* signed a cooperation agreement in order to increase the reach and impact of both covenants.

The government participates as a party in the Covenant and encourages participating companies to identify the risks and deal with them. The government is also working to ensure that the activities of textile programs that the Netherlands supports as donors, such as the Better Work program and the Partnership with the Fair Wear Foundation, benefit to the implementation of the agreements of the Covenant. The government also has its own role to contribute to a solution to the problems. By talking to the local governments in production countries about improvements and compliance with legislation, the government is trying to improve the conditions of employees and the business climate in the countries concerned. In addition, the government actively promotes cooperation within the European Union for the sustainability of the textile sector.

(1) <http://www.indianet.nl/pdf/LabourWithoutLiberty.pdf>