

Dear Friends,

Greetings from Church of Bangladesh!

I would like to let you know the latest information of Savar Tragedy. The rescue work has ended on 13th May which was started on 24th April just after collapsing the building. The rescue team could recover 3,565 people of which 2,438 were alive and 1,127 dead. In hospitals 12 people died those who were severely injured. There are 223 are under the treatment of different hospital in Savar and Dhaka. It is considered to be the worst garment-factory accident in history, as well as the most horrible structural failure in modern history. There are many buildings including factories are in risk of collapse and some of them have been identified by the legal authority.

According to Bangladesh Garment Manufacturer and Exporters Association 3,122 workers were working in five factories housed in the building at the time of the collapse. The factories were manufacturing the garments for some brand retailers including Benetton, Bonmarché, Cato Fashions, the Children's Place, el Corte Ingles, Joe Fresh, Mango, Matalan, Monsoon, Primark, and Walmart.

The building along with garments factories housed a bank, apartments, and several shops. The shops and the bank on the lower floors were immediately closed after discovering several cracks in the building, but the garments factories ignoring the incident and the warning day before the incident forced the workers to attend the duties and the building collapsed during the rush-hour of that very morning immediately after the power cut when five/six big generators was switched on, on different floors of the building. So far five reasons have been found by government enquiry for the collapse: low-quality construction materials, use of black money in the illegal construction and approval process, building codes not being followed, establishing garments factory on top of a market complex and the building was loaded with vibrant machineries and the garment workers were forced to enter the hazardous structure. One local resident described the scene as if "an earthquake had struck.

Within hours of the collapse, the United Nations offered to send expert rescue team with dogs, micro-cameras and other equipment to the site, but that offer was denied by the authorities. We are not aware about the reason of the denying. The government declared 25 April as the day of national mourning.

More than half of the victims were young women, along with a number of their children who were in day-care within the building. A team comprising the army, fire service personnel, police and Rapid Action Battalion and a good number of volunteers engaged to assist the survivors for escaping from the building. We are very grateful to rescue team, particularly the young volunteers who didn't have any such experience and modern equipments to rescue people from such a disaster, but did a remarkable job. Praise God for His mercy. On 10 May, 17 days after the collapse, a woman named Reshma was found and

rescued alive and almost unhurt under the rubble. She said she survived all those days on a few biscuits and a bottle of water. It is indeed a miracle! Approximately 316 people are still missing and 291 dead bodies buried without tracing their identity. There are some people who have been searching their family members until today. One volunteer of the rescue team Ejajuddin Kaikobad tried to bring out a living young woman Shahina but unfortunately he caught by fire. Finally, Shahina's could not be rescued and her dead body brought out through a deep whole, and the volunteer also died later in the hospital in Singapore. He was buried with a national honour.

During the time of agony we received many letters of condolence from you , empathy with assurance of your prayers. Some of you have expressed your generosity to support the victims. For your information, we have done something directly and also through a Trust of Popular Daily News Paper (Meril-Prothom Alo Savar Shohayota Fund). We have a plan to do something more for the victims those who have lost their only one earning member of the family, lost their legs and hands and broken their limbs especially back bone. They have to go through a long time treatment and care. At the same time CoB has taken an initiative to form a Social Action and Advocacy Forum under the National Council of Churches. For all these we have prepared a budget and started sending to the partners those who are interested and able to support the victims.

My suggestion for our partners and friends in abroad for their campaign and advocacy will be as follows -

1. Talk to the powerful bodies and the investors and buyers companies of garments that they should create continuous pressure to the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and Bangladesh knitting Manufacturers and Exports Association (BKMEA) to ensure:
 - a) Security of the workers that they must be protected from fire and unhygienic condition inside the factories.
 - b) Keep the main gate open with guards during the working hours.
 - c) Fair wages for the workers and equal wage for both man and woman. Better to make the payment on weekly basis.
 - d) Provide necessary facilities to the infant babies of the woman workers and pregnant woman.
 - e) Canteen facility for lunch and tiffin.
 - f) Uniform for the safety of special workers

- g) Holidays should be given to all workers for festival and social reasons.
- h) Formation of trade union. Please note that Trade Union does not work effectively in Bangladesh. It gets leader captured and used for their interest like political party leaders of Bangladesh. They can be easily an instrument of owners or/and political parties in Bangladesh.
- i) A joint forum of Garments importers, exporters and local govt. should be established to monitor the smooth running of Garment Factories and protecting the rights of the workers.

Importers and Buyers should not stop their garments business in Bangladesh. At present Garments manufacturing sector is the second largest foreign exchange earner of Bangladesh. A large poor section of our population is surviving on this sector. For the proper maintenance, security and protecting the rights of workers the overseas buyers companies should closely work with the BD government and the garments manufacturing and export association of Bangladesh (BGMEA). We have to keep in mind that the garments manufacturers are rich, powerful and greedy. In Bangladesh most business men have no ethics. They want only easy profit. People in Bangladesh are suffering from many problems because of corruption and lack of moral values of the leaders and powerful. Bangladesh is a highly populated country and poor uneducated people are the larger part of that. Political parties are not interested in population control in interest of using the poor as vote bank with little money. Islam as religion does not believe in birth control and polygamy is also a reason for growing population.

Some leaders think some of our neighboring countries are jealous to our economic progress and they would like to see that Garments factories are shifted from Bangladesh to their own countries. There is a strong doubt that a conspiracy is behind the scene to create a bad reputation of garments factories in Bangladesh. However, it was not the reason behind collapsing the building in Savar.

Considering all the above for any advocacy for the protection of the rights and interests of the garments workers should not forgo the core interest of Bangladesh economy.

Thank you once again for your concern and cooperation.

Yours,

+Paul S. Sarker

24th May, 2013 Dhaka