



A Joint Statement by Odhikar and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

BANGLADESH: Investigate deadly factory fire, compensate victims

Dhaka/Paris; 13 July 2021: Bangladeshi authorities should conduct a prompt, thorough, and impartial investigation into a deadly fire, make the findings of the investigation public, and prosecute all those responsible, Odhikar and FIDH urged today.

On 8 July 2021, a massive fire broke out at the Hashem Foods and Beverages factory, owned by the Sajeeb Group, in Rupganj, Narayanganj District, resulting in 52 workers killed and 50 others injured. About 50 workers are reported missing.¹ Most of the victims were women and children. The warehouses were built illegally and there was no fire-fighting system in the factory in place. Furthermore, the emergency exit was kept blocked. On the day of the fire, the gates of the building were kept shut.² As a result, the workers were trapped inside and could not exit the building. The building that collapsed due to the fire was built without a proper plan and without complying with the Building Code.³

In the aftermath of the fire, information emerged that a series of other labor rights violations had been occurring at the factory, including the fact that workers' wages and overtime were not paid on time and that children as young as 12 years were employed in the factory, in clear violation of Bangladeshi labor law.⁴

In the days following the fire, workers and the relatives of the deceased and missing gathered to search for the missing workers and demand justice. They were accosted by police, who fired tear gas and rubber bullets when clashes occurred between them and the protestors. As a result many people, including relatives of the workers, were injured.⁵

Despite a legal and policy framework aimed at eradicating such incidents and human rights violations, irregularities and shortcomings in the building of factories and conducting factory inspections have become widespread as a result of pervasive corruption and mismanagement within the relevant government agencies. Many workers have been killed and injured in factory fires, in many cases due to exits being blocked, to a lack of fire-fighting equipment, and to other forms of negligence. Such incidents occurred at Tazreen Fashions in 2012, Smart Garments in 2013, Tampako Foil Factory in 2016, and a chemical warehouse in Old Dhaka in 2019. Most of those responsible for these incidents have not been brought to justice and most of the victims

¹ Dhaka Tribune, *Massive blaze at Narayanganj factory claims 52 lives*, 09 July 2021, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2021/07/09/narayanganj-factory-fire-rages-on-many-feared-dead> and Manabzamin, *Those who went missing in the Rupganj tragedy*, 11 July 2021, <https://mzamin.com/article.php?mzamin=283042&cat=3/>

² Al Jazeera, *Deadly fire at Bangladesh food processing factory*, 09 July 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/9/deadly-fire-at-bangladesh-food-processing-factory>

³ Ibid

⁴ According to section 34(1) of the 2006 Bangladesh Labor Act, 'no child shall be employed or permitted to work in any occupation or establishment. Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/76402/110637/F-1265526237/BGD76402%20Eng.pdf>. Dhaka Tribune, *Child workers still missing in disastrous Narayanganj factory fire*, 09 July 2021,

<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2021/07/09/child-workers-still-missing-in-disastrous-narayanganj-factory-fire>; and Prothom Alo, *Many workers were not found, most of them children*, 09 July 2021, <https://www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/district/□□□□-□□□□□□-□□□□-□□□□□□□□-□□□□□-□□□□□□□□>

⁵ Jugantor, *Clashes with police at the scene of the fire, looting of weapons*, 09 July 2021, <https://www.jugantor.com/country-news/441078>

and/or families have not been compensated. Moreover, the use of child labor in factories remains prevalent, and has only increased as a result of a growing economic gap worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Odhikar and FIDH demand that the government publish an accurate list of those killed, injured and missing in the Hashem Foods and Beverages factory fire and pay adequate compensation to the victims and their families. The two organizations also urge Bangladeshi authorities to take prompt and effective measures to prevent similar incidents in the future.

Odhikar meaning 'rights' in Bangla is a registered human rights organisation based in Dhaka, Bangladesh established on October 10, 1994 by a group of human rights defenders, to monitor human rights violations and create wider awareness. It holds special consultative status with the ECOSOC of the United Nations.

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) is a non-governmental federation of human rights organizations around the world. Founded in 1922, FIDH is the oldest international human rights organization in the world, and today brings together 192 member organizations from 117 countries. Its core mandate is to promote respect for all the rights set out in the UDHR.