

Bangladesh: statement from Biagio Chiarolanza, CEO of Benetton Group

First of all, I'd like to thank all of those who reached out to us over the past several weeks. To us, this confirmed that you care about the same values we care about. It also tells us that we were right in taking, from the very beginning, a highly proactive approach to seeking real, long-term solutions to the problems affecting the garment industry in Bangladesh, starting with the need to guarantee the safety of factory workers.

What happened at the Rana Plaza in April was a human tragedy of huge proportions. It will leave a lasting mark in the hearts of everyone, as it has done with everyone at our company. And this is the reason why we immediately joined forces with other industry participants, including NGOs and trade unions, to form the Bangladesh Fire & Building Safety Accord and, separately, in a very short time launched our own program in partnership with the Bangladesh-based NGO BRAC, the largest non-governmental organization in the world also recognized as the leading NGO on sustainability.

Much has already happened since those early days in the aftermath of this tragic event. The Accord has moved into its implementation phase. Meanwhile, our program with BRAC is already assisting both those injured in the collapse of the Rana Plaza building with their medical needs, including limb replacements, as well as helping the families of the victims with their long-term requirements. Nevertheless, we realize that more needs to be done by us and all parties involved, including setting guidelines for how to compensate the victims of such tragedies, and we fully intend to play a role in this effort as well.

Regarding compensation in particular, over the last couple of months we actively participated together with other stakeholders to discussions aimed at setting forth a multi-stakeholder framework within which this issue could be effectively addressed. In the end, the majority of companies and several other industry participants felt that the meeting called for this week in Geneva would not do so, mainly due to lack of clarity around the objectives as well as the nearly complete lack of involvement allowed to several key stakeholders. As a result, we decided to focus our efforts and resources in working directly with those affected by the Rana Plaza disaster and their families so that we can provide them with concrete help while they need it the most. At the same time, we remain committed to playing a role in finding an industry-wide, multi-stakeholder approach to this issue - much like the Accord did for fire and safety.

I look forward to providing further updates regarding our progress in Bangladesh, where we aim to launch additional, concrete initiatives in the near future. In the meantime, thank you again for telling us that you care.

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