

Shila Begom, Rana Plaza victim

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My name is Shila Begum, I am 25 years old and I was working on the 5th floor of the Rana Plaza building. I'm not allowed to say for which brands we were producing in my factory. I used to have a husband, but he died 8 years ago and I have a daughter who is 10 years old.

I injured my right hand and arm when the building collapsed and I was brought to a medical clinic. They could not treat me as needed – I was operated on and they removed the uterus – for my right hand I am getting treatment every day free of cost at a rehabilitation centre. I am living with my younger sister who is working in another garment factory, she supports me and gives me some money, that's how I survive: in hardship – my daughter is with my elder sister in her rural house.

We need fast compensation – and care for children of Rana plaza victims, like a school so that they can continue their lives – me and other Rana Plaza victims who were injured did not receive adequate medical treatment, so I ask buyers, the government and the BGMEA (the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Export Association) to establish a separate hospital dedicated completely to the Rana Plaza victims, as well as for their rehabilitation. I dream about a good future for my daughter – if I can support her to be educated, that is my hope and dream. I fear that my younger sister will marry and I will have to leave the house because the future husband doesn't want me there.

Nurum Nahar, NGWF organiser

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My name is Nurum Nahar, I am 40 years old and I am the Vice President of the National Garments Workers Federation (NGWF) and I organise workers in the factories.

I was a garment worker in a factory myself and now I work full-time with NGWF to organise workers in factories. I go to factory gates and meet factory workers, I gather their contact details and call them when they finish work so they can come to the office. It is very difficult. I talk to them and give them my business card. I tell them to come to the NGWF office and we will help them make their life better, and that they have to give their contact information and go by the office.

What I do is to go to a factory like I were looking for a job and once I am inside, I make contact with the workers I meet, give them my card and tell them that I am an organiser in NGWF. I tell them they can always contact me when their factory is not paying them the legally minimum wage. Often when I invite a worker, they say that they don't have time because of their work and family take up all their time.

At first, when approached, workers are not very interested in joining the union given that they have very busy lives with their jobs and families. So I go again and again to convince them to join until they do. Also it helps to have something in common with them to gain their trust. So I go to the same groceries stores, become their friends and that makes it easier to convince them.

Yes, trade unions are not accepted. I was fired from my job because I was participating in trade union activities – the director took a picture of me during

my activities, specifically in an action plan meeting of NGWF. He sent it to the line chief and he fired me because of it. In 2012, the last time the management called me to come to the office and asked me where I had gone yesterday, I said I had been at home, so then they showed me a picture they had taken of me the day before to show me that they knew where I was, which was with NGWF. I answered them that it was actually a workers team. They fired me.

Bangladesh labour law of 2006 states that trade union rights are guaranteed under law, but in practise, workers are fired when they join a union, therefore I want to train workers to know more about their rights, ensure women maternity benefit and ensure safety at workplace.

My life as a sweatshop worker

www.dailymail.co.uk

A Canadian journalist working undercover in a Bangladeshi sweatshop has revealed details of the back-breaking work and appalling conditions children as young as nine have to deal with.

'The factory wasn't big: about two dozen sewing machines lined the walls of the windowless room, about half the size of a basketball court. (...) A quick tour of the building revealed no fire extinguishers, only one exit - the front door - and little more than a hole in the ground, down a rat-infested hall, for the toilet.

Staff worked from 9am to 9pm with only a lunch break. The girls tasked with snipping off threads from the men's shirts being made, had to sit cross legged in the middle of the floor.

Ms Aulakh joined the girls on the floor and, under Meem's direction, was taught how to snip away loose threads without marking the clothes.

'It was back-breaking, it was finger-numbing. It was particularly rage-inducing.'

she said.

'Not because it was painfully hard work but because children like Meem hunched over hour after hour, squinted at the threads, cleaned one collar after another, one cuff after another, one arm piece after another until the piles were depleted.'

Like many young factory workers, Meem was taken out of school when the family ran into hardship. With her mother pregnant and unable to work, the family needed Meem to help boost the income.

Overnight, Meem went from being a carefree schoolgirl to a factory worker, toiling for 12 hours a day.

'It works for everyone,' Smitha Zaheed, of the Dhaka-based Independent Garment Workers' Union Federation, said. 'Factory owners get workers who are not demanding ... while the parents get to keep what the kids earn because the kids don't know any better.'

Meem's wages are paid to her father and she is allowed to buy herself a glittery hair clip each month and an occasional ice-cream.

'It is not as if Meem's parents don't care for her, they simply had no choice,' Ms Aulakh wrote.

Despite the long hours and aches caused from sitting hunched over for hours at a time, Meem was always smiling and her only complaint was that she was yelled at if she chatted too much or hummed too loudly.

Workers like Meem are paid about \$25 a month. They are allowed half a day off every Friday and do not get holidays or paid sick leave.