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Public Statement on Deaths of Garment Workers in Nandan Denim factory, Gujarat, India

A fire, resulting from criminal negligence, broke out at the Nandan Denim factory in Ahmedabad, the capital city of the Indian state of Gujarat. The fire killed at least seven workers.

The factory is located in the Narol area of Ahmedabad city which has become a hub of denim production for the global fashion market. It houses a cluster of big factories, processing units, and garment production in a supply chain eco-system which is totally unregulated. Zara, Inditex, Ralph Lauren, VF Corp., Wrangler, Target and Primark are some of the global brands sourcing from the region.

The reported figures of 50-60 workers working in the factory is an under-estimate because it appears to only include permanent workers on payroll. Other workers working in the factory, have reported that this particular department where the fire took place, employed at least 100-150 workers. The under-count is a result of the fact that most of the workers are contract labour, who have not been provided with factory identification, so as to make them invisible to the eyes of the law.

This global denim sourcing hub has reported accidents and fires repeatedly including more than ten major fire and accidents in the past year itself. There has been absolute regulatory failure in factory and labour inspection, building codes and standards, and fire and safety systems. The failure of fire and safety system is evident from the Chief Fire Officer, F. Dastur, admitting that inadequate inspection system has led to more than 10,000 units to be without fire and safety license – Nandan Denim factory is one of them. A visual inspection of the Nandan Denim building shows absence of features such as ventilation, fire and safety system, including alarm system. It has been reported that there was only one entrance and exit which could be accessed through a ladder which is clearly highly inadequate for evacuation in case of fire. It has been reported that workers working inside the room in the factory, continued to work, even after the fire had started and were burnt because there was no adequate alarm system to trigger evacuation.

The audit system of the several sourcing global brands have failed to detect large scale violation of fire, safety, building codes and labour rights in this denim hub. This hub is dominated by migrant labour living in inhuman housing conditions, with 10 people to a tiny room, who have to sleep in shifts. They work for more than 10-12 hours daily and are denied statutory minimum wages. There is massive wage theft and denial of social security. A local legal aid centre has been able to recover – Rs 1 crore (150,000 USD) in a year – and this is only a fraction of the reality. The core reason for labour violations is the subcontracting system where most of the

workers are sub-contracted to small, petty contractors. Workers are regularly dismissed for expressing any grievance.

The local administration and the police department have initiated criminal and regulatory actions but from past experience, once the media limelight recedes, the collusion between officials and perpetrators resume and become dominant.

Asia Floor Wage Alliance supports the local trade unions and labour rights organisations' demands that

- A multi-agency team (police, fire and safety department, building inspection system, and labour administration system) be formed to investigate the Nandan Denim factory fire comprehensively as this a serious case of criminal negligence
- All documents including Wage Registers, Attendance Registers, list of contractors be seized
- Contractors and their workers' statements be recorded
- Since incidents like the Nandan Denim fire is a repeated phenomenon in this hub, the Government of Gujarat should have a full scale, comprehensive inspection of the whole industry and make public the audit report.

Asia Floor Wage Alliance supports the local trade unions and labour rights organisations' holding global brands responsible for the egregious violations and the deaths of the workers. Any unilateral brand initiative, that does not involve local trade unions is a total failure, lacks credibility and legitimacy, and is merely a public relations exercise. We demand the following of global brands:

- **Brands take responsibility and work with trade unions and labour rights organisations to create transparent regulatory mechanisms and systems to ensure that denim manufacturing is compliant with international and human rights laws.**
- **Brands compensate for the death, injury and loss of employment resulting from this fire on basis of international standards on living wage and on workers' pain and suffering.**

--The AFWA Team