



Asia Floor Wage Alliance: A Short History at the Brink of Transition

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It was a challenge to write this short history of a decade-old campaign. Considering space constraints, the history cannot ever claim to be complete. Nevertheless, it is a reasonably comprehensive effort that relied on volumes of old documents, minutes, correspondences, and reports.

The Asia Floor Wage Alliance (AFWA) is an international campaign and alliance for a living wage and collective industrial bargaining in the global garment industry. AFWA's inception, in 2007, rests on the shoulders of resilient, innovative and inspiring social movements, particularly spanning the last decades of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century.

1 Triggering Influences

The last two decades of the 20th century witnessed a global movement advocating the de-regulation of policies by nation states with regard to the free mobility of capital and the unfettered and unaccountable advancement of corporate agenda. Multinational companies from the global North and governments drove this movement, with the acquiescence of governments in the global South.

The garment industry is one of the oldest global industries and this global corporate agenda restructured the industry rapidly, negatively affecting garment workers' human rights. Garment workers' rights activists, at both the production and retail ends, therefore led international accountability campaigns around the globe. Activists supported the organising of workers, publicized labour rights violations, fought to hold employers and multinationals accountable to fair labour standards, and organised consumer-led anti-sweatshop campaigns. Their campaigns brought together companies, social organisations, unions, and government and international institutions in an effort to build multi-stakeholder initiatives for accountability. Garment workers' rights activists also extensively documented the

industry, including working conditions, the global supply chain, and consumer attitudes. In short, activism in this area has a long and committed history.

During this period, various mechanisms developed for corporate monitoring and accountability in the garment industry, in response to the pressure from activists. Many multinational companies developed Codes of Conduct, which, however, were only voluntary. Along with codes, various monitoring mechanisms evolved. International complaint mechanisms like the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) mechanism have been painstakingly developed.

Traditional trade unions did not respond adequately to these new, urgent, global, and rapidly growing challenges. However, new social alliances began growing, bringing together women's movements, radical people-centred development activists, community based organisations, and parts of the international trade union solidarity movements.

Consumer campaigns grew in consumer countries as a tool to build solidarity and leverage in a brand-controlled industry. In garments, the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) in Europe, founded in 1989, grew into a premier campaigning organisation for garment workers' rights. They educated and mobilized consumers, lobbied companies and governments, and offered direct solidarity and support to workers' struggles. CCC brought together trade unions, women's organisations, and consumer advocacy groups to build a vibrant international movement for garment workers' rights. CCC developed national chapters in different European countries as well as a robust Urgent Appeals strategy. They motivated European trade unions and Global Union Federations, thus playing a vital bridging role.

In Asia, new organising in the garment industry led to the formation of militant unions, women workers', migrant rights and labour rights organisations in various countries such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.

In the United States, consumer campaigns took the form of anti-sweatshop movements on campuses (such as United Students Against Sweatshops) and communities (such as Sweat Free Communities). The Worker Rights Consortium (WRC), founded in 2000 by university administration, labour rights experts and student activists, became a respected watchdog and monitoring force for the protection of garment workers' rights.

Home to major garment brands, the United States underwent radical changes in the 1980s and 90s with regard to social movements. Demographics changed slowly but surely due to immigration from countries negatively affected by US government policies. Communities of colour and immigrant communities worked hard to build unity as they were pitted against each other.¹ More importantly, immigrant workers and workers of colour began to collectivise and represent themselves. Not all formed unions; some formed "workers' centres" or associations. There was increasing involvement of people, who would be traditionally considered "non-labour," in issues and concerns of labour. An important manifestation of new organising in the USA was Jobs with Justice (JwJ), founded in the late 80s, by a few forward-thinking unions to build broad support for labour's cause, drawing on radical community and students struggles in communities of colour.²

During this period, movements also began to come together globally to fight corporate-led globalization. A turning point in this anti-globalisation movement was November 1999, when thousands protested and derailed the meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) ministerial in Seattle, USA.

¹ In 2000 even the AFL-CIO, the national federation of labour unions in the US, came out with a long-due resolution in support of immigrant workers and the legalization campaign for the "undocumented".

² JwJ locals developed in all over the country. Each local built a social alliance of union locals and a host of other entities such as community groups (e.g. immigrant rights' organisations, parents' associations, social service agencies, and so on), students' organisations, etc. JwJ believes that coalition building has to be based on trust and reciprocity; workers' rights struggles must be part of a larger movement for economic and social justice; and international solidarity should be based on an acknowledgement of global inequalities, commitment to worker unity, and reciprocity.

Among the various responses to corporate-led globalisation was the powerful drive to develop the World Social Forum (WSF) as a counter to the annual World Economic Forum. The beginning of the World Social Forum process in Porto Allegre, Brazil in 2000 offered the opportunity for an open horizontal space without any dominant leader where those who sought another vision for the world could meet and discuss issues. This provided opportunities for interaction between diverse view points and a convergence of global justice movements.

The WSF organisers decided to move the event to Mumbai in 2004, the first time it would be held outside of Brazil. The New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI) was a key organiser of the WSF Mumbai because of its determination to develop global strategies. WSF helped numerous organisations like NTUI to leap frog into global work.³ In particular, many affiliates of NTUI had already begun developing a model of trade union work that also integrated campaign work within it. So, they made strategic alliances with organisations like Centre for Education and Communication (CEC) in India, CCC in Europe, Committee on Asian Women (CAW) in Thailand, and Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC) in Hong Kong in order to strengthen this model of work. NTUI was also a member of the South India Coalition for Garment Workers' Rights, a coalition of unions and NGOs from Chennai, Tirupur and Bangalore. This Coalition had been active in Bangalore in pushing for a common strategy towards unionization and

³ Meantime in India, in the 1980s and 1990s, two phenomena had deep consequences for the Indian labour movement. One was the rise of independent unions at the local workplace level in the private sector. These independent unions practiced workplace-level collective bargaining and industrial level collective action without affiliating with party-affiliated central trade unions. Gradually, they grew to be 30 percent of the organised workforce. The second phenomenon was the ushering in of neoliberal economic reforms in 1991. With the government's gradual withdrawal from the interests of labour, traditional trade unions that had relied on political support began to face new crises. Around 2000, a core group of union leaders began to have discussions and meetings around the country. They felt the need for a new union initiative, independent of any single political party, to consolidate the growing mass of independent unions into a national platform, scale up workplace-level unions to confront global capital and develop industry level strategies, build unity between organised and unorganised sectors, across political lines, and be attentive to social discrimination that divide the workforce. This led to the founding of the New Trade Union Initiative.

collective bargaining backed by campaign for labour rights. It had experience of working with campaign organisations like WRC, CCC, SOMO, and others.

At the WSF-Mumbai, NTUI leaders met with Jobs with Justice (JwJ) from the USA, based on common principles.⁴ JwJ and NTUI began initiatives to develop a model of North-South international labour rights work. Garment was one of the industries selected for collaboration based on the NTUI's own recent history of organising in this growing export sector.⁵

2 Building Blocks

a. Initial Discussions

A significant and growing portion of the garment global supply chain is in Asia. South Asia (especially India) and China is home to about 42 percent of the global population and close to half the labour force of the world – as well as the consumer market. They represent the global working poor and a major portion of the global supply chain. Until this working population is secured and stabilized through decent labour standards and basic economic prosperity, its exploitative conditions will depress global labour standards and prosperity. Therefore, fair and decent global development is impossible without the fair and decent development of the Asian workforce.

Garment workers' rights' activists and unions had learned that, although it is important for

⁴ The collaboration between NTUI and JwJ was an effort to build convergence of social movement unionism. Although it was a bilateral (bi-national) relationship at the core, they were clear that such relations must in the long run have multilateral potential.

⁵ In 2004, Jobs with Justice organised a 9-city US labour tour for trade union leaders from the New Trade Union Initiative. It was hosted by Jobs with Justice local coalitions in the various cities and included public talks, press interviews, and local and national level strategy meetings with unions and community organisations and public talks. NTUI leaders deepened their understanding of building social alliances. NTUI and JwJ also met with Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN) – Canada.

employers to recognize the workers' right to organise, superficial recognition in itself rarely leads to unionization and bargaining power. Workers had attempted organising over the years in numerous, courageous ways. However, workers who had acquired bargaining ability in a certain factory and demanded higher wages, had done so at the threat of relocation and jobs moving elsewhere where the wages were lower. In other cases, workers demanding higher wages from a manufacturing facility were told that their employers' hands were tied by the insufficient prices that they received from buyers, that is, parent multinationals. Therefore, workers' collectivities with bargaining strength needed measurable and bargainable demands appropriate to the economics and the powerholders of the industry.

In India, the NTUI had already been involved in guiding the formation of unions in industries that have been difficult to organise, such as the garment industry. NTUI wanted to look at campaigning as a way to aid unionization. In turn, the spread of unionization would strengthen campaign activities at the ground level, and enhance collective bargaining capability and the democracy of the labour movement.

In 2005, there was a meeting in Bangalore of NTUI, Civedep, Fedina, Garment Mahila Karmikara Munnade, CEC, Save, and JwJ, to follow up on garment workers' rights. Constraints on wage bargaining and the threat of relocation by brands were identified as clear problems. A Working Group on garment workers was therefore created to explore the question of whether this was a phenomenon in other countries as well.

This Working Group came to an understanding that, given the global structure of multinational companies and international institutions, the fight for labour standards and rights could not be carried out in a single plant location or even in an industry within just the nation-state. In fact, the entire global supply chain had to be addressed. But firstly, everyone felt that strong relationships needed to be built, particularly across Asia. One idea that was floated was that of an "international tribunal" targeting important corporations in the garment industry.

With this perspective, the group reached out to colleagues in North America, Europe, and Asia.⁶ They decided to initiate a process⁷ for

"1) Developing a strategic international alliance for a campaign against an agreed-upon corporate target along the global supply chain

⁶ Email dated April 14, 2005

⁷ Garment Campaign Note July 2005

to expose the lack of adherence to international labour standards in such a chain, and to enforce accountability

2) Organizing an international event with the alliance to launch a campaign with specific demands of the supply chain of the agreed-upon corporate target."

One statement in particular from the meeting minutes states:

"...demands have to go beyond the assertion of Right to Organize and must actually provide organizers with a leverage for organizing. One of the key issues that allow the race to the bottom through the global supply chain is a descending, almost bottomless wage scale. We see this as a key obstacle to unionization in this industry. We think that Asia, being the bottom of the market, it is important for organizers in Asia to debate the following issue: even in the presence of national minimum wage laws, and so on, the lack of a scaled or defined wage that is linked to the global supply chain and to the capacity of the industry to pay, weakens the capacity for unionization."

This group decided to begin a two-step strategy:

Initiate the development of an Asia-wide alliance ... and to come to a consensus: bottomless wage scale where the bottom is Asia, and identification of dominant corporate target(s) and their global supply chains. Aside from India, we will involve partners from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Taiwan, Hong Kong and China. The end activity to this consensus-building process will be a final working meeting or a workshop of the Asian partners, in India.

The Asia-wide alliance will also reach out to organizations beyond Asia in order to develop an international consensus and strategy around the key issues. In the process of this alliance building, that will also narrow down on a corporate target, we will hold a hearing or an inquiry or a tribunal to launch our campaign and to focus attention on the chosen corporate target.

After the international event, the alliance will continue with the campaign priorities set during the process of alliance building.

A senior research intern from the UK helped with preliminary research on wages in the Asian region, which helped to kickstart the crystallization of the notion of a cross-border wage.

b. Formation of Asia Working Group

On December 2-4, 2005, the first Asia-level consultation on a Garment Workers' Campaign was initiated in India by the Working Group for garment workers. As the report of the meeting states, "This alliance is seeking to expose the lack of adherence to international labour standards in the global garments supply chain and to enforce accountability in this respect. Towards this end, this collective is initiating various processes and actions." It was attended by participants from Bangladesh, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, United States, and the Fair Wear Foundation from the Netherlands.⁸ At the meeting, the situation in different countries was discussed as was the issue of wages. We decided that, to move the process, research and consultations needed to take place in garment-producing countries in Asia. A list of organisations to contact in Cambodia, China, Malaysia, Pakistan, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Taiwan was made.

In 2006, during the conversations and meetings that followed, there was consensus that the bargaining power of Asia's garment workers was weak. For example, if garment workers demanded a higher wage, supplier factories would warn them that brands would stop their orders and relocate to another Asian country with lower wages. It was clear therefore that at the level of a single country, raising wages would be difficult because of the power of brands to relocate from one country to another within a region.

At the same time, union and labour activists had an uneven understanding of the political economy of the garment global supply chain, leading to lack of unity, common analysis and framework for collective action. A consensus

emerged that collective action should focus on the one issue that causes the most anxiety and leads to struggles – the wages of garment workers in Asia.

What was really needed was a wage strategy that would not trigger brand relocation. In other words, labour organisers and activists would need to ensure that raising wages would not disturb or change the competitive status of the country; thus making brand relocation futile. This would be possible only if wages rose simultaneously by the same factor in garment-producing Asian countries. This wage began to be called "Asia Floor Wage" (AFW). Informal meetings and conversations continued in Asia, Europe, and North America to discuss the possibilities. There was general skepticism that such a strategy could be developed.

An opportunity arose in January 2006 when the Clean Clothes Campaign and the Centre for Education and Communication held an international meeting on "Garment Industry and the International Labour Market: Local Action – Global Campaigning" in Delhi between January 19 and 21, 2006. A small workshop was organised within that space to discuss AFW and the problem of wages. At the workshop, there was consensus that the concept of a consensus-driven and union-driven AFW for Asia was worthwhile.

This was a key turning point. Several activists and leaders began doing their own research and enthusiastically sharing data, perspectives, and theories. The First Asia Working Group was formed, and it met on January 21, 2006, with people from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Canada, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Phillipines, Thailand, and the Netherlands attending.⁹ The Asia Working Group decided on the Coordinator¹⁰ and identified that the next steps should be outreach and finding the resources for a formal meeting.

⁸ Decisions of First Asia Working Group, circulated January 24, 2006

¹⁰ Anannya Bhattacharjee

3 Formal Inception and Consensus Building

During the ensuing months and for over one year, several small-scale discussions and debates took place among organisations in Asia, North America, and Europe. The overall consensus was that AFW, a cross-border wage ought to be pursued. However, to begin this in an inclusive way, an international meeting would be needed. In Bangladesh, the National Garment Workers Federation NGWF (union) and Karmojibi Nari (an NGO) were in discussions, and they suggested "in the midst of the national uproar on low wage workers and garment workers, they recommend[ed] holding off [an international meet] till after September [2006] as all energy is targeted to the current urgent situation."¹¹

a. First AFWA International Consultation, Bangladesh, 2007

During the winter of 2007, we got the fortunate attention of Action Aid International which agreed to give a grant for an Asia-based convention to discuss an Asia strategy.¹² Karmojibi Nari had the capacity to organise the meeting and the First AFW International Consultation was held on May 26-28, 2007 in Dhaka.

Participants from 11 countries attended.¹³ On the eve of the meeting by which time all participants had already gathered in Dhaka, the Bangladeshi government informed the organisers that they wanted the meeting cancelled; garment workers in Bangladesh had just recently protested against low wages and the government did not want this meeting to trigger more protests.

Fortunately, a well-known organisation in Dhaka offered their premises for the meeting as we did not want to openly thwart the government by holding the meeting as planned. In the

¹¹ An email update for India Committee for AFW on July 5, 2006

¹² Email to AFW Friends & Allies dated January 27, 2007

¹³ List of participants, as of May 1 2007

subsequent days, we continued to hold the meeting between their office and our hotel rooms, and were frequently interrupted by Intelligence Bureau officers sent to enquire into what we were doing. The government clampdown, however, reduced Bangladeshi participation and smaller group meetings had to be held separately.

Our discussions were successfully concluded, despite the clampdown. Although AFW-related preliminary discussions began in 2005, the founding year is commonly stated to be 2007 because of this First AFW International Consultation. At the meeting, a strategy was formulated and a "Position Statement of Asia Floor Wage Alliance" was written, which stated that "It is important to find a bargainable and appropriately formulated demand in the context of a global production chain that would motivate a strategic collective organizing for." It committed to developing "a regional and differentiated wage formulation demand that would set the high end for garment industry manufacturing in Asia." Importantly it developed "Principles for Conducting AFW Campaign" which stressed Global South leadership, open dialogue, solidarity, decentralisation, broad cohesion, and deepening of national processes. Furthermore, it stated "The AFW campaign agrees that its core purpose is to achieve recognition of AFW and actualize it in Asia and for this, will give due diligence to each alliance member's sensitive issues. It will not engage and get involved in issues that are divisive to the campaign and would weaken its efforts."

The year 2007 was a year of various activities to move the work of the AFWA forward, as decided during the Dhaka meeting. We were aware that every country had unique union dynamics of unity and division. Therefore, at the outset, the AFWA leadership was interested in developing national grounding for AFW in various Asian countries. For a given country, we decided not to stress on one unified process – different unions could lead processes within a country as long as they could all agree on the urgent issue of a living wage for garment workers.

Different Working Groups were formed for Preparatory Research, Alliance and Networking, Capacity Building and Education, and International Hearing.

In September 2007, the Committee on Asian Women (CAW) and TIE-Asia organised a conference, “Garment Sector – Sharing and Action,” where AFW was asked to introduce the context to a gathering of activists and women workers.

Some of us then had the opportunity to meet with the ILO in Southeast Asia and were told that the ILO’s current work on wage was converging with the timing of the Asia Floor Wage work on wage. This was indeed exciting news and thereafter ILO released its first Global Wage Report 2008 in which several facts and assertions converged with AFWA’s premises and analysis. This gave a significant boost to our confidence.

The AFW concept was presented at a conference on wage and equity organised by ILO-Bangkok in which Thai government officials, workers’ organisations, and other civil society groups were present.

b. Second AFWA International Consultation and Formation of Working Steering Committee, Thailand, 2007

Clean Clothes Campaign held its International Campaign Forum meeting on November 26-29, 2007 in Bangkok, in collaboration with Thai Labour Campaign and CEC-India. It was a meeting to discuss the Play Fair Olympics campaign and Giant Retailers as targets. The AFW concept, campaign and strategy were discussed in four different workshops, with different audiences, including unions and NGOs from all over the world, and global organisations such as the ITUC, TWARO, and ITGLWF.

This provided AFWA the opportunity to hold its Second International Planning meeting in Bangkok on November 28, 2007. All International Planning Meetings from here on always had a component on country-level priorities, struggles, the relevance of AFW to national priorities and the socialization of AFW.

We made a more detailed timeline for 2008 focusing on deepening national processes, building our alliances, developing broader dissemination and education on the AFW idea, and researching in order to strengthen our arguments and strategy. We began to develop easy-to-understand material and a website, and a logo.

We developed a **Working Steering Committee** with the plan that as national processes got completed, we would finalise the Steering Committee by March 2008. We revised the Working Groups and announced the regional/campaign coordinators of AFWA.

c. Third AFWA International Planning Meeting: AFW Figure and Formation of International Steering Committee, Hong Kong, 2008

The AFW Working Steering Committee initiated a need-based survey of garment workers in producing countries in order to gauge living wage demands among garment workers. The anchor for AFW was to be the Food Basket. The Steering Committee and participating unions agreed that the Food Basket would be 3000 calories – which was the official basis for Indonesia’s KHL (governmental figure for living wage). Since Indonesia was the youngest democracy and had most recently formulated this policy, the AFWA took that as the best regional standard. The participating unions also decided that AFW should be based on the family and not on an individual. To this end, we took the 15th Indian Labour Conference’s (ILC) standard of family with 3 consumption units; after studying working class family sizes in the region. CCC and WRC researchers crafted a wage survey which was used to do the first AFW need-based wage survey. Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, China, and Sri Lanka, conducted the research and the survey results were analysed.¹⁴

¹⁴ An elaborate Research Plan from Dhaka was created but it was outside the capacity of this minimally funded alliance. We also sent a plea out to multiple scholars in the Global North to help with research but did not receive any positive responses. AFWA was also keen to research at that time possibilities for global supply chain regulation and enforcement which was beyond our capacity, and indeed retrospectively, we realise now that we were looking for something that had yet to be defined and would be proposed only in 2016 at the ILO.

Need-based monthly wage figures from different countries were converted to PPP\$¹⁵. The set of figures ranged for example, from 336 PPP\$ in China to 417 PPP\$ in Bangladesh and 593 PPP\$ in Indonesia.

The AFWA decided that it needed now to hold a crucial meeting bringing together alliance members from different countries to work towards finalizing the AFW figure. We decided to hold the Third International Planning Meeting in Hong Kong on October 17-21, 2008 and about 30 participants came from China, Hong Kong, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, US, UK, The Netherlands, and Belgium. The global union federation, ITGLWF, also attended and was represented by Neil Kearney.

At the meeting, **need-based survey figures** were presented both in national currency and PPP\$. The conversion of the national living wage as per the need-based surveys into the PPP\$ was done in order to have a common unit of measure and reference. Conversion brought out the range of PPP\$. The unions debated on the range from 400 PPP\$ to 500 PPP\$ by discussing the feasibility of the demand taking into account factors such as minimum wage, living wage norms, unions’ wage demands in the country, and regional convergence. At the end of a fruitful and long debate, the AFWA fixed 475 PPP\$ as the consensus figure.

The AFWA decided to announce this demand to the brands and the broader public through a public launch. The date was set to be October 7, 2009 the International Day of Decent Work. This meeting marked an important transition in the Asia Floor Wage Campaign. The campaign made the transition from an internal consensus-building and education phase to a phase to move the campaign to a public launch in 2009. The **“AFW HKG Decision Statement Oct 08”** came out of the Hong Kong meeting where key decisions were taken. The meeting was conducted in an open manner with a lot of debate and discussion, and satisfactorily concluded taking into account all points of view.

¹⁵ Since, exchange rates are volatile and based on money market, we decided to use the World Bank’s PPP\$ as a standard for conversion because it was based on purchasing power parity.

The “AFW HKG Meeting Report Oct 08” reports on the details of the meeting.

A formal campaign structure was formed. The Working Steering Committee was dissolved and a formal **International Steering Committee (ISC)** was formed. The AFWA decided that the International Steering Committee would be numerically Asian-dominated, with Europeans and North Americans. As more countries would join, their representation would be added to the ISC.

The International Steering Committee nominated a **Coordinating Committee (CC)** for closer guidance. It was decided that each country would form a National Campaign Coalition/Working Group (NCC) and develop a campaign plan to deepen national work and anchor the international campaign. The International Secretariat and South Asia coordination would be based in India, the East Asia in Hong Kong, the Southeast Asia in Indonesia, Europe in The Netherlands, and North America in the USA.

4 AFW in the Public Domain

In 2009, we began to find in the media, analysis that supported the demand for higher wages in Asia. Articles made the link between Global Economic Recovery, Wage Rise & the Role of Asia -- Newsweek, “Give Them a Raise”, January 17, 2009, and The New York Times, “Falling Wage Syndrome”, May 5, 2009. We found the Asia Floor Wage becoming increasingly relevant as researchers showed increasing wage gap globally and concluded that the wage gap has to be reduced to stimulate the economy.

Diverse activities continued in AFWA member countries such as workshops, education and awareness building, union meetings, and engagement with new organisations. AFWA prepared a wonderful comic book in different Asian languages, which was disseminated widely among workers.

a. Fourth AFWA International Planning Meeting: Campaign and Public Launch Planning, China, 2009

China-based allies offered to hold the Fourth International Planning Meeting for AFWA in Beijing on June 21-22, 2009. The meeting would focus on the public launch of the AFW. It was decided that the central international launch would be held in Delhi, India. At the meeting, we made detailed plans for the public launch including development of educational materials (posters, comic books), concept notes on different questions regarding the living wage (such as gender perspective), and getting endorsements and statements of support from international organisations and leaders.

b. Public Launch

In India, a national meeting of independent unions and NGOs was held to begin planning for the launch. In Sri Lanka, the Campaign Committee, convened by ALaRM continued to actively participate and plan. In Indonesia, TURC (SE Asia hub for AFW) organised a meeting of unions in Jakarta where the AFW was presented and the public launch was discussed. In China, further research on wages was conducted by a senior academic.

Stephanie Luce, Professor at University of Massachusetts-Amherst in the USA, wrote a “Theoretical Report” on the Asia Floor Wage that could be used for argumentation and placed the AFW within a scholarly framework. Jeroen Merk at CCC developed a “Popular Report” on the Asia Floor Wage for wider reading. An essay was published by New Labor Forum in the United States called “Raising the Floor: The Movement for Living Wage in Asia”.

In the meantime, AFWA met with the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal (PPT) in Italy to get their collaboration on the long-desired “International Hearing for Asia Floor Wage and Decent Labour Standards in Garment Global Supply Chain.” AFW representatives met with the Gianni

Tognoni, General Secretary of the PPT in April 2009. The meeting evolved criteria and terms of collaboration and PPT was invited to the central international launch.¹⁶

The Central International Launch was held in Delhi, India with simultaneous events in participating countries. The launch date was set to be October 7, 2009, the International Day of Decent Work. Preparations for AFW campaign materials began in full speed – logo, gathering of workers’ stories for a campaign report, public statements and perspective papers, FAQs, posters, and comic books, which proved to be highly popular in years to come.

Prior to the public launch, AFWA wrote to 60 brands in Europe and USA, announcing the AFW figure and asking to meet with brands to strategise how they could deliver the AFW. We received quotes from all over the world from experts applauding the public launch of the AFW. An art sculpture was created specifically for this event.¹⁷

The Asia Floor Wage entered the public domain on October 7, 2009. Along with the Central International Launch in India, launch events were held in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Hong Kong, Europe and North America. Due to the shoe-string budget of the campaign, many individuals and organisations dug into their own funds to make this historic start possible.

After the public launch, brands began to visit the International Secretariat of AFWA to interrogate and challenge the AFW formulation. AFWA representatives were also invited to a variety of meetings in Europe and USA – to meet with brands, multi-stakeholder initiatives, unions, other activists and so on.

¹⁶ Notes from PPT Meeting April 2009

¹⁷ Asia Floor Wage: Reflections, Critiques, Aspirations, Central International Public Launch, October 6-7, 2009

5 National and Regional Processes (Asia)

This section, in addition, to above sections, goes deeper into country-wise processes in Asia. It is divided into three phases or time periods – a) 2007-2009, b) 2010-2011, and c) 2012-2016.

AFWA had regular international and regional planning meetings, often by coordinating with existing international and regional meetings. AFWA functioned with low funds, with cooperation of members and allies and grew with the commitment of its partners. Meetings were held multiple times in countries such as Indonesia, Turkey, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, India, Hong Kong, and Belgium.

AFWA-International Secretariat sent regular updates on the work of AFWA as well as solidarity alerts from partners to its mailing list.

a. Phase I: 2007-2009

The first phase of national and regional processes in Asia consisted of deepening national processes, building alliances, engaging in education, and conducting research, including a need-based survey of garment workers to determine a living wage.

Bangladesh



Amirul Haque Amin from the National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF) was asked, in the early years, to take the lead in developing the idea of living wage in Bangladesh. However, in the interest of unity in Bangladesh, he argued that it would be better if a non-union entity took on the task of country level coordination.¹⁸ Accordingly, an NGO took on the function and worked on building a representative national

¹⁸ Action Aid-Bangladesh took on the responsibility.

platform in the following years. However, although unions and NGOs participated in the AFWA campaign, a broad country process only came together in 2015. In December 2015, meetings and seminars were held as a result of which national processes started. BNPS in Bangladesh became the coordinating organisation in Bangladesh.¹⁹ In this process, many unions (over twenty) participated in this country with high garment density.

Hong Kong/China



The Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC) initially and later Globalisation Monitor (GM), played important roles in taking forward the idea of AFW in Hong Kong and mainland China. GM became the official East Asia contact organisation for AFWA and HKCTU also gave support. GM translated all AFWA materials into Chinese and worked hard to socialize the concept. They held a roundtable in Hong Kong and helped representatives from AFWA from the International Secretariat to travel to China to make invaluable connections with academics, lawyers, and activists. We found high receptivity in China among top scholars and labour lawyers. In fact, one of the foremost scholars was willing to conduct a wage survey in China, to find evidence to support the idea of the Asia Floor Wage. In the following months, seminars were organised in some areas of China.

India



The India Committee-AFW continued to meet to discuss the developments; garment unions (some of whom are with NTUI) were part of AFWA -- such as GATWU, GAWU, GAFWU and in later years GLU, KGWU, and MMP. The India Committee also reached out to other unions; Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) and Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) joined. The INTUC, one of the largest union

¹⁹ The Bangladesh meeting was attended by 35 participants, 23 organisations most of which are unions.

federations organised an AFW seminar with industry, government officials and unions in an area that manufactures ready-made garments. It was very well received. All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) organised a seminar in South India where local wages and working conditions were discussed and the concept of AFW presented and discussed. HMS provided India-based inputs to AFW at various local and international meetings. The AFWA International Secretariat operated out of the Society for Labour and Development, a labour rights organisation.

Indonesia



In 2007, representatives from the AFWA International Secretariat made a trip to Indonesia to meet with many of its unions and two full day regional wage seminars were held in Bandung and Jakarta, resulting in good linkages being made between local wage struggles and the concept of the AFW. We also met the ngos LIPS and TURC. Soon after, TURC showed initiative and interest in taking the idea forward in Indonesia and became the Southeast Asia contact point for AFWA. (In later years, this coordinating role was taken up by LIPS). Initially GSBI, SPN joined, followed by FSBI, SBSI-92, and Garteks in later years.

Indonesia's thinking on living wages was quite advanced and the government's own positions were encouraging. The government's definition of KHL (living wage) and the premise of 3000 calories for a physically active worker became key to the AFW definition. TURC involved 10 union leaders to act as field researchers and learning from AFW rationale and concept, did a need-based survey in four areas.²⁰

Sri Lanka



ALaRM, a national alliance of unions and NGOs had just completed a wage research report which proved to be extremely useful.

ALaRM also took on the role of coordinating AFW discussions in Sri Lanka. A Working Committee was formed by ALaRM consisting of the Women's Centre, Dabindu Collective, Jathika Sevaka Sangamaya (JSS), United Federation of Labour (UFL), and National Workers Congress – which began meeting in November 2008. (Subsequently, the National Free Trade Union and the Red Flag Union also joined). They developed a national plan for building a wider consensus on the AFW, on creating a group of trainees to raise awareness amongst the workers about the AFW campaign, and on using the media to publicize the AFW. A learning session was held by a Wages Boards Representative attached to the Department of Labour on the subject of minimum wages followed by further analysis of the AFW by an AFW Steering Committee member from Sri Lanka.

Thailand



CAW helped in Southeast Asia. In Thailand, a senior Southeast Asian activist²¹ helped AFWA organise three workshops with Thai unions in Bangkok, Saraburi and Rayong. Over twenty unions attended and the concept was discussed thoroughly. The activist sent the following analysis:

- There is a lack of understanding of wages.
- The minimum wage setting on behalf of workers is represented by the National centers, who have no interest except for the payments they receive to sit on boards.
- Trade unions officials who are independent and negotiate with companies do not know how to prepare to negotiate.
- Overall there is lack of acumen/experience in the unions.
- If we want to have a campaign on AFW. We have to start from the beginning. That is to give a very good grounding on wages. It has to have its own dynamics and evolve...

The regional coordinator organised three days of workshops on wages and the AFW. In 2007, AFWA representatives from the International

²¹ Arokia Dass

Secretariat made a trip to Thailand to meet with its unions and a preliminary seminar was held by one of its strong unions to discuss wages in Thailand.

b. Phase II: 2010-2011

The second phase, after the public launch of the AFW, consisted of strengthening existing national processes, expanding to new countries, and deepening solidarity work as struggles for minimum wage increases grew. Militant minimum wage struggles grew across Asia, most notably, in Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Indonesia demonstrating the need for the AFW without delay. AFWA expressed unwavering solidarity with minimum wage increase struggles put forth by trade unions in the affected countries. AFWA believes that each such national minimum wage struggle is a necessary and vital step towards the realization of a regional minimum living wage for millions of Asian workers.

AFWA expanded to Cambodia and explored Vietnam.

Cambodia



In August 2010, AFWA presented AFW for the first time in Cambodia. On 4th August 2010, a large seminar was held in Cambodia with the broadest possible union participation. All labour unions and NGOs participated with enthusiasm and the AFW was discussed within the context of Cambodia's minimum wage struggles over the past few months. AFWA presenters visited several unions and NGOs, and the ILO. Cambodian organisations, which had recently calculated the living needs of their workers, were unanimous in their support for the AFW. Initially, the Labour Program of CLEC took on the role of coordination; this was later taken on by CENTRAL. Unions such as CCAWU and CATU joined.

In the Cambodian struggle, AFWA engaged with Cambodian partners to articulate how the minimum wage struggle is different from

the AFW, insisting that the gap between the minimum wage and the AFW had to be negotiated with the brands. Furthermore, the AFW International Steering Committee called on brands and retailers to take responsibility for resolving the urgent situation of stagnant poverty wages, along with suppliers and governments. The AFW Secretariats wrote to brands and retailers as well as the industry associations and governments, expressing this position. In Cambodia, as a result of the strikes that unions organised in order to demand a living wage, the minimum wage figure was increased through the provision of bonuses and allowances for food, attendance and seniority. AFWA was firm that ensuring freedom of association and raising national minimum wages above the current poverty levels are central to ultimately ensuring that Asian garment workers receive the Asia Floor Wage.

Vietnam



In 2011, the AFWA, the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL), and the National Textile and Garment Union (the industrial union) had a dialogue on working conditions and wages. The dialogue was fruitful and interesting; much information was shared and the perspective of global supply chain bargaining generated significant excitement. The AFWA also met with the government and various international NGOs. The dialogue and subsequent meetings were a great learning experience with satisfactory outcomes.

AFWA deepened its work in existing countries and continued to build regionally.

Indonesians reported on the wage discourse and negotiations in their country. They pointed out that brands set the price to suppliers, based on the legal "minimum wage" definition as opposed to the legal "minimum living wage" (KHL) definition in Indonesia. This was in contradiction to the brands' positions on wanting to pay a living wage to garment workers. In India, violent opposition to freedom of association by management and government

²⁰ Report from TURC, July 17, 2008

was of paramount significance. So too was the large scale wage theft that further added to the poverty of workers struggling under inadequate, poverty level minimum wages. In India, struggles were going on to raise the minimum wage, implement a minimum wage, and to develop global supply chain bargaining.

The AFW International Steering Committee met in Jakarta from March 12-14, 2010 to take stock of developments since the public launch

of AFW in October 2009 and to consolidate plans as they moved forward. It was time for serious implementation of the AFW through a transparent and accountable mechanism that included workers' representative organisations. UNI had endorsed AFW; and we mourned the premature passing away of the ITGLWF General Secretary, Neil Kierney, who had been a key participant in the Hong Kong meeting where we adopted the AFW.

AFWA decided to develop an Asia Brand Bargaining Group of Asian unions, prepared to meet as a group with buyers. The AFW-ISC articulated the following demands of buyers:

1. Pay the living wage
2. Recognise AFW as a benchmark for living wage
3. Map the differences between AFW, minimum wage and prevailing wage.
4. Adjust the pricing to make higher wage possible
5. Enter into dialogue with local AFW partner (local worker organization)
6. Conduct pilots with suppliers and local worker organizations
7. Stabilise relations and orders with pilot suppliers
8. Ensure Freedom of Association, a pre-condition for AFW
9. Write to sourcing countries' governments stating support and need for AFW; send copy to AFW Alliance.

In November 2010, CCC organised an international campaign meeting in Bandirma, Turkey which provided AFWA with an opportunity to hold AFWA's Sixth International Planning Meeting on November 23rd in Turkey. Interest in the AFW was expressed by Pakistan and the Philippines; Vietnam was also willing to explore the idea. AFWA decided²² to develop a broader framework to build the AFW campaign by

- Foregrounding gender in AFW work and developing women workers' leadership
- Strengthening Asian labour's negotiating position across the global supply chain.
- Integrating Access to Freedom of Association, Right to Collective Bargaining, Ensuring Minimum Wage Compliance

The AFW-ISC declared May 1, 2011 as a Global Day of Action for Asia Floor Wage. The common message would be "Living Wage for an 8-Hour Day!". An optional additional line, for those who wished to articulate it, was "Garment Workers Demand [AFW in national currency] per month!" This tradition was followed again from 2012 till 2014.

C. Phase III: 2012-2016

The third phase consisted of conducting bargaining trainings across Asia, setting common brand targets and demands, holding of the National Peoples' Tribunals, regular revision of the AFW figure, Global Days of Action and solidarity, developing a multi-country complaint strategy, joining of more new countries, and developing the concept of regional agreements and enforceable brand agreements.

AFWA organised bargaining training sessions across member countries in Asia, at both the national and regional levels. These training sessions brought in large numbers of women workers in all countries and also international migrant workers in countries like Malaysia. They were successful in bringing into focus the role of brands, the importance of targeting them in a global supply chain industry like the garment industry, and in shaping common demands. The regional training sessions helped develop the Asia Brand Bargaining Group (ABBG), gave rise

²² AFWA Sixth International Planning Meeting Rpt, November 2010

to common brand targets and demands, and highlighted the need for regional enforceable brand agreements. AFWA also learned from national agreements such as Bangladesh's Safety and Health Accord and Indonesia's Freedom of Association Protocol.

In addition, in response to the consistent union busting, attacks on freedom of association, and increase in short term contracts and contract labour, AFWA and ABBG foregrounded the fact that the AFW or the payment of a living wage was inextricably tied to freedom of association, the end of short term contracts and of gender-based discrimination.

As mentioned above, AFWA met with the Permanent People's Tribunal in Italy in April 2009. That meeting transformed our original idea of holding one International Hearing to a series of National Hearings in Asian countries in order to deepen the process, strengthen unity, and bring the process closer to workers. The Tribunal provided a great opportunity to broaden and deepen national processes, forming national consensus and engaging with brands.

AFWA, under the guidance of eminent human rights scholar, Dr. Upendra Baxi, produced a paper on the AFW and the importance of making a minimum living wage a fundamental human right. This paper would serve to anchor the argumentation that developed through the various Asian national tribunals leading up to the International Tribunal in 2015.

National People's Tribunals were held in Sri Lanka, Cambodia, India and Indonesia, between 2011 and 2015, ending with a Concluding Tribunal in Sri Lanka. Each tribunal was organised by the country's national organising committee. This provided organisations a point of unity and solidarity. The jury was selected by the national organisers and consisted of national and international eminent persons. Workers were trained on testifying and the process reached deep into the grassroots to bring out important stories demonstrating the exploitation in the garment global supply chain and the gendered aspects of labour violations and industrial relations.

The successful organising of the NPTs demonstrated AFWA's strength in bringing about an alliance between the affiliates of global union federations as well as new unions emerging from militant and different traditions, into a shared framework that foregrounded the wage struggle as the context for unionisation. In this sense, AFWA as a combination of a transnational union network and a social alliance network for labour rights was greatly strengthened. These two axes reflect the broad alliance that is required to address the components of the global supply chain.

The NPTs also invited local government and suppliers but their presence was minimal, demonstrating the fear of the threat of relocation by global brands. Several brands were invited to testify; a few participated.

AFWA partners ALaRM in Sri Lanka and CAW organised the First National People's Tribunal/Hearing in Colombo, Sri Lanka on March 27-30, 2011. Women garment workers testified on the exploitative working conditions they faced and various experts made the case for the need and feasibility for a living wage and the importance of moving away from poverty-level definitions of minimum wage. The judges gave a verdict on the various parties in the global supply chain and referred positively to the AFW's useful formulation for delivering the much-needed minimum living wage.

The Second National People's Hearing/Tribunal on Living Wage for Garment Workers was held in Cambodia on February 5-6, 2012. It was organised by a representative AFW Cambodia Committee of the AFWA.

The Third National People's Tribunal on Living Wage for Garment Workers was successfully held in Bangalore on November 22-23, 2012. It was supported by twenty unions and NGOs across India.

The Fourth National People's Tribunal on Living Wage for Garment Workers was held in Jakarta, Indonesia on June 21-24, 2014.

The verdicts from the NPTs unequivocally called on brands to immediately implement the

payment of a living wage and not waste time and money on unnecessary research. The verdicts also affirmed AFW as an important measure of a minimum living wage within a global production network framework.

After having held four NPTs, the AFWA International Steering Committee decided that the Concluding Session of the NPTs, in collaboration with the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT) would be held in Sri Lanka in December 2015. This final tribunal was different from the NPTs. It focused on previous NPT testimonies and verdicts, international institutions such as the ILO and the UN, and was directed at international institutional means of accountability. AFWA presented a petition on making a living wage a fundamental human right and on the importance of inclusion of minimum living wage in the ILO's core labour standards.

At the concluding session the jury would assess 1) government and brand efforts in moving towards a living wage, 2) the importance of making living wage a fundamental human right, and 3) the role of the ILO in regulation of the global garment supply chain. The jury heard from experts such as Olivier de Schutter of the UN ECOSOC Committee, Stephanie Luce, the expert wage academic, Frank Hoffer Senior official from ACTRAV/ILO, Upendra Baxi, eminent human rights scholar, as well as country reports from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia and Cambodia, reports on brand responses to living wage from Clean Clothes Campaign, expert opinion from Yale Law School regarding the importance of living wage in the global supply chain, among other testimonies.

The jury gave a firm, and strong verdict urging the ILO to immediately adopt the living wage concept as one of its core labour standards. It stated that the goodwill of the brands is no longer credible: "the brands' goodwill, to be legitimated, should translate into concrete financial investments for the urgent implementation of effective living wage policies in support and collaboration with Governments and workers' organizations."

The jury also noted that "The reports presented during this Session by experts representing international organizations, as well as the increasingly concordant opinion of the European, USA, and Asian academic world, have been clearly supportive of the demands presented in the submission" and they pushed international institutions, especially the ILO in "Adopting and publishing criteria for minimum living wage, using the Asia Floor Wage as credible benchmark in the global garment industry."

AFWA called for a Global Day of Action on November 20th, 2015 in consumer / retail and production countries. We requested members, allies and supporters to organise actions and send a strong message to brands that they must pay the difference in Cambodia and begin to pay living wage in Asia. November 20th fell within the period of retail and Black Friday actions in the USA (November 10th-27th).

AFWA partners and countries organised for intervention at the first-ever tripartite discussion by the ILO at the ILC in June 2016 in Geneva. This is further described below.

Pakistan



In 2015, positive developments took place in Pakistan. Although NGOs and unions from Pakistan had actively participated in AFWA from the beginning, so far, a broader country wide process had been lacking. In December 2015, meetings and seminars were held and PILER became coordinating organization in Pakistan.²³

²³ Pakistan meeting was attended by 30 participants from labour organisations as well as supplier organisations. In Pakistan the condition of garment industry was discussed, including low wages and the downward pressure on prices faced by Pakistan's suppliers from brands. The AFW was discussed in detail; the suppliers were intrigued by the fact that AFW is a demand of the brands because suppliers' margins are extremely small compared to the maximum profits made by the brands.

6 Public and Global Engagement

a. Europe

In Europe, the CCC has been AFWA's foremost ally and partner, as is evident from activities described above. The CCC's International Secretariat socialized the idea within Europe among CCC coalitions and AFWA representatives visited Europe to meet with some of them at various gatherings. The CCC also attempted to connect AFWA with its Giant Retailers' Campaign.

AFWA engaged in significant outreach in Europe. AFWA Steering Committee members presented in the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands. In the UK, War on Want and Action Aid-UK joined AFWA. We also talked to Unite and TUC. Action Aid-UK and War on Want organised a seminar on AFW in London where JwJ presented on the work done in the US, AFWA and NTUI spoke about the concept and idea, and Labour Behind the Label described the UK perspective. The seminar was attended by Unite, ETI NGO Caucus, ITGLWF, Praxis, Action Aid-Bangladesh, and media groups.

The AFW was convincingly presented and argued at the Play Fair 08 meeting organised by the CCC, ITGLWF and ITUC in Hong Kong. AFWA was asked to nominate a member to the Giant Retailers (GR) Campaign Steering Committee. The GR campaign would integrate the AFW demand into its campaign.

The CCC in French-speaking Belgium invited AFWA to the Asia Europe People's Forum in Brussels. AFWA was widely featured in a variety of platforms and received strong support. On October 4, 2010, AFWA was featured at a Roundtable, "Decent Work, Decent Life for All" where brands and members of the European Commission were invited.

AFWA organised several workshops at the International Forum organised by the CCC and CAW in Turkey in November, 2010. AFWA shared experiences with unions and NGOs from Turkey, Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe, and exchanged strong affirmation and support. In particular, AFWA organised an Asia Global Bargaining Workshop and the challenges and strategies identified were prescient, as we look back²⁴.

In 2012, the CCC decided to focus on coordinated living wage campaigns across the European continent to support the AFWA. This was an appreciated development as the AFW campaign would get an additional boost internationally.

AFW was featured prominently at the Living Wage Forum in Brussels organised by the CCC on October 12-14, 2015. AFWA made strong arguments for the living wage to be made a fundamental human right in the UN and for the ILO to define the criteria for a living wage.

Action Aid – UK, with Northumbria University in the meantime, published a report titled “Towards Sustainable Labour Costing in UK Fashion Retail” authored by Professor Doug Miller. The report would contribute implementation ideas for the Asia Floor Wage with the idea of “ring fencing” and “labour costing.”

b. United States

In the United States, JwJ strongly supported AFWA in a variety of ways. They invited activists from India, Indonesia and Hong Kong to their National Conference. They held numerous meetings between AFWA and several US unions to socialize the idea of AFW. JwJ also linked the campaign with the Big Box campaign and made connections with the International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF). WRC was already engaged. The International Brotherhood of Teamsters joined AFWA. The AFL-CIO was very supportive of the campaign.

In February 2016, AFWA partners from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Cambodia met with USA partners and unions in Washington DC to continue the building of the Global Alliance for Justice at Walmart. AFWA partners also attended the JwJ National Conference in Washington DC and met with hundreds of labour activists and union members, and participated in a workshop on global bargaining.

C. ILO and Global Union Federations

In 2010, the Asia Floor Wage had its first meeting at the ILO headquarters in Geneva, following up from discussions with ILO in Asia. The meeting with the ILO was fruitful and we discussed how the AFW concept is partly based on the ILO's history around wages and freedom of association and how collaboration would help enrich and strengthen this work further. The Asia Floor Wage was also formally introduced at the ITUC meeting in Brussels by HMS and INTUC and was seen as a proactive solution during a time of distressful discussions.

The AFWA-International Secretariat was invited to publish an essay in the ILO journal that came out in 2012. Its publication provided significant boost to the theory behind the campaign and provided clarity on questions that were being asked commonly.

AFWA actively participated at the historic ILC 2016, described further below.

ITUC organised a seminar on the Asia Floor Wage during the ILC in Geneva in June 2014. The seminar held on June 5th was well-attended by senior members of the ITUC, ILO, IndustriALL; trade unions from Malaysia, Nepal, Indonesia, Myanmar and India; and employer organisations from Thailand and Myanmar. Members of the International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF), United Workers Congress (UWC), and National Guestworker Alliance (NGA) from the USA were present as well. This seminar was a key marker of AFW's increased visibility and credibility in the labour movement around the world.

AFWA produced a consolidated publication titled *National Peoples Tribunals on Living Wage for Garment Workers in Asia*. On November 17, 2014, the AFWA released this report and organised an International Hearing/Synthesis Event with representatives of five Global Union Federations and the ILO. Representatives included Sharan Burrow, General Secretary,

ITUC (International Trade Union Congress); and senior officers from IndustriALL, ITF (International Transportworkers Federation); IUF (International Union of Foodworkers); Union Network International (UNI); and the ILO. This event was the first dialogue between AFWA and the global unions and resulted in a satisfactory exchange and commitment for cooperation.

A common statement was written in which the following positions were common:

1. In the face of overwhelming evidence of grave and systematic violations of individual and collective human rights suffered by garment workers, immediate action needs to be taken by a variety of stakeholders.
2. The evidence points to the fact that a living wage and decent working conditions are a pressing necessity in the industry.
3. In an industry which props itself up with illegal compulsory overtime, inhuman productivity measures, systematic denial of social security payments, overwork leading to fainting in the workplace, and active suppression of the right to freedom of association in the industry, it is clear its future is not sustainable.
4. Whilst decent pay is just one aspect of decent working conditions, it crucially impacts on the decisions workers make regarding health and safety, overtime and their ability to support their families. The impact of low pay ripples through their families, communities and countries.
5. Multinational brands must acknowledge their complicity in the rights violations. The brands are the real employers in the global industry, with suppliers taking the role of proxy employer, stripping workers of their right to directly negotiate with their employers.
6. The global union movement is open and willing to work with brands on finding solutions. Where brands are not willing to engage and negotiate, we will continue to strongly put our case for change, using industrial action where necessary.
7. The meeting found a broad agreement that unions at all levels, and the wider social alliance, need to collaborate and move towards a new paradigm for the industry, led by the global unions.
8. A joint strategy - between global, national and plant level unions, labour rights organisations, consumer campaigns and social movements - is the start of sustainable change. This strategy has taken a new step today.

²⁴ Asian Global Bargaining Workshop : Challenges and Strategies

d. Other Solidarities

AFWA was invited to South Africa to a garment workers' conference in Durban, organised by Women Working Worldwide in April 2010. The idea was well-received by the participants from Africa.

In 2011, AFWA was invited to participate in the International Festival for People's Rights and Struggles held in Manila, the Philippines. The AFW was prominently featured in different activities. The Permanent People's Tribunal (PPT) organised a workshop on the PPT, its history and current activities. The AFW was one of the two PPT activities featured. The International Women's Alliance held its General Assembly and decided to collaborate with AFWA.

AFWA was invited to attend and present at a workshop organised by Belgian-based World Solidarity Movement in Jakarta, Indonesia in April, 2016. AFWA and WSM had close discussions on mutual strategies and decide to work more closely in the garment sector.

7 Engagement with Brands

AFWA reached out to sixty brands during the public launch in October 2009. After the launch, the AFW concept was introduced and discussed in many forums including brands, retailers and the broader fashion industry. We had several meetings with multi-stakeholder initiatives and brand-led entities, such as the Fair Labor Association, the Ethical Trading Initiative, and the Fair Wear Foundation as well as many individual brands. Some meetings with governments and suppliers also started. The AFW began to mount a cascading pressure.

At initial meetings with brands, they admitted being well aware of the extreme suppression of wages and it was clear that they were being

pushed to the point where they were forced to admit the need for a better wage and wage setting process. Some brands voiced that it was particularly useful that AFWA had developed a living wage definition that provided actual wage benchmarks for a number of countries.

Brands repeatedly told us that they were involved in pilot wage projects to increase wages in either a particular factory or within a group of suppliers. However, they refused to disclose the details of the pilot projects and AFWA partners expressed their frustration with time being wasted on pilot projects without foreseeable results.

Some brands stated that they supported the attempt by AFW 'to bring all stakeholders, together including retailers, brands, suppliers and crucially governments, who we believe are key players in this topic.' Some were surprised at how good the AFW concept was; It "might have legs", and it was something they could work on.

The AFW proposal was presented at the Fair Labor Association on October 26, 2009, and at a meeting with the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) on November 4, 2009, in which twenty-three company representatives participated. The ETI expressed willingness to further dialogue and take the proposal seriously.

In 2010, three roundtables with brands and retailers were organised by the CCC in the Netherlands, Switzerland and Belgium. The AFW was discussed with over thirty brands and retailers and the industry associations BSCI and Europe Outdoor Group. The AFWA met with the Fair Wear Foundation to discuss specific collaborations.

A few brands organised further in-depth meeting with their company leadership to explore the AFW demand for brand action in more depth.

Some brands publicly announced plans for paying living wages. These plans sounded bold but lacked precision, transparency and accountability, and finally, results. These include Marks and Spencer and H&M.

Some brands engaged resorted to the common fall back position – that is, that states were responsible for setting minimum wages at the level of living wages. AFWA's position was that minimum wage struggles at a national level are important. But, AFWA made it clear, repeatedly, that global buyers were responsible for making the AFW deliverable. AFWA's demand was that brands had to provide the revenue to close the gap between the AFW and national minimum wages.

In 2011, the Asia Floor Wage International Steering Committee released a report titled "Route Map to the Asia Floor Wage: 10 Steps Brands and Retailers can take towards a Minimum Living Wage".

Only one brand took steps to explore a pilot project for implementation. Puma, a member of the Fair Labor Association, approached AFWA with a proposal for a pilot project. This pilot project would explore possible implementation mechanisms for the AFW in specific supplier companies and would work with local partners of AFWA. The pilot project would be guided by a steering committee of AFWA members, and representatives from Puma and the FLA. Puma's goal was to explore savings created by more efficient, green production systems which would be better for the environment and also produce savings for living wages. However, Puma abandoned the project after two years, claiming it was more difficult than they had anticipated.²⁵

In 2010, under the guidance of the Fair Labor Association, David Vaughan-Whitehead's book *Fair Wages: Strengthening Corporate Social Responsibility* was published. It argued that wages needed to become part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) issues.²⁶ This book surveyed suppliers across Asia and found violations that AFWA had been asserting. It laid out a large number of dimensions that were

²⁵ As the AFWA explored pilot projects with brands to build towards the implementation of Asia Floor Wage, the AFW-ISC in 2011 decided it would be important to clearly distinguish AFW Pilot Projects from many ongoing Brand Pilot Projects. The methodologies and the principles of the two kinds of pilot projects are fundamentally different. The AFW-ISC developed "Principles for Pilot Projects" to state its public position on the methodology of pilot projects.

²⁶ Published by Edward Elgar, 2010.

needed to address wage issues – such as living wages, minimum wages, social dialogue, working hours and wage development in accordance with prices, enterprise performance and changes in technology and human capital. Unfortunately, the laying out of several dimensions became a camouflage for brands to obfuscate concrete demands like AFW demand and claim that ALL these dimensions needed to be addressed before a living wage could be paid. Brands began the Fair Wage Network, which only served to delay the process of delivering a living wage and acted as a face-saver for brands, leading to more wastage of resources on unlimited and non-transparent explorations and no improvement to workers' poverty.

In any case, by the end of 2010, a year after its launch, the Asia Floor Wage Alliance had decisively won in the field of varied public discourse and debates across the globe. The AFW started gaining acceptance within the global garment industry as a credible, implementable, and timely minimum living wage for Asian garment workers. The living wage became an issue that refused to go away and brands had to respond to the overwhelming demand for change in the global garment industry.

In 2013, the governments of Germany and the Netherlands organised a European Conference on Living Wages with all stakeholders in which they featured the AFW as a credible and legitimate formulation for a living wage and urged businesses to pay living wages. Following on this conference, an Asian Living Wage Conference (ALWC) was organised in Pakistan in May 2016: "As a follow-up meeting to the European Conference on Living Wage, held in 2013 in Berlin, the ALWC will build upon the debate on living wages in global supply chains, promoting cooperation instead of competition between textile producing countries in order to raise the income level across the board in the region. Paying living wages should be part of a regional development strategy and the ALWC will promote national action plans to be developed in the participating countries....."

The ALWC will be a 2 day conference with participation of high level government officials from the host country Pakistan, Asian countries and OECD governments as well as international brands, manufacturers, trade unions, NGOs and other stakeholders.”

The introduction of the AFW into the public domain by AFWA radically changed public discourse and debates. Wages became a central issue, specifically, the payment of living wage. Brands had to respond to the public challenge of conducting production while paying poverty level wages and the notion of a cross-border living wage was established.

In addition, in response to the consistent union busting, attacks on freedom of association, and increase in short term contracts and contract labour, AFWA and ABBG foregrounded the fact that the AFW or payment of a living wage was inextricably tied to freedom of association, end to short term contracts and to gender-based discrimination.

8 Revision of Formula

When the AFWA-ISC met in Brussels in October, 2010, among other things, it decided on the methodology for revising the Asia Floor Wage every 1-2 years. The AFW-ISC approved the frequency of repeating food basket research, and the methodology for updating the formula from January 2009, based on the Consumer Price Index.

Subsequently, AFWA-IS prepared a standardised AFW Food Basket based on country data. This Food Basket is used as a basis for periodic revisions of the AFW. Between the years that the food basket is researched, the AFW is updated using the consumer price index and AFW 2009 as the base figure.

9 International Complaints & Bargaining

At an AFW-ISC meeting held in Sri Lanka in 2011²⁷ on the topic of negotiating with brands, the concept of an Asia Brand Bargaining Group (ABBG) was introduced. It would be composed of unions who would be the negotiating body with brands. An initial concept note was drafted. As a first step, AFWA had an internal discussion on the most common brands that would be targeted; a coordinator in each country took the responsibility of tracing the suppliers for the targeted brands.

On November 24, 2012, AFWA held its Ninth International Planning Meeting in Bangalore, India. We began discussing some innovative ways to test the international complaint mechanism such as filing of a “Regional Complaint” to the ILO-Committee of Experts on Freedom of Association and using the OECD complaint mechanism for MNCs. We decided to carry out a programme of internal education among union members in Asia for developing complaints, collectively, to the ILO and OECD.

The first ABBG meeting was held on March 4-5, 2013 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The meeting was called based on the note developed in Sri Lanka in 2011. It was agreed in Sri Lanka that “The Asia Brand Bargaining Group (ABBG) is composed of unions who have garment unions and/or are committed to unionizing in garment supplier factories. Labour support organizations, such as research and campaign NGOs who can support bargaining efforts and work directly with the unions in ABBG can also be part of ABBG. The goal of the ABBG is to coordinate bargaining across national borders and within the framework of the global supply chain in the garment industry, in which the majority of the manufacturing workforce in Asia is engaged. Its goal is to bargain and win concrete benefits for garment workers working in supplier factories that supply garments to multinational brands and retailers.”

²⁷ Asian Brand Bargaining Group Concept Note, March 2011

We also began to track the gap between minimum wages and the AFW and actively supported minimum wage struggles in Asian countries. The AFWA expressed its commitment to strengthening the Asia Brand Bargaining Group (ABBG) which would be the face of bargaining with brands and which consists of trade unions. The ABBG and AFWA identified top brands for targeting for unionization and bargaining for higher wages. The ABBG would use the strategy of “Living Wage Contribution” to bargain with the targeted brands, leveraging the OECD and ILO complaint mechanisms for social dialogue and bargaining, and actively participate in pushing for mechanisms for global regulation of global supply chain.

In 2013, we initiated National Bargaining trainings in several AFWA countries. On January 18-19, 2014, an ABBG meeting was held in Sri Lanka with opening remarks made by the Labour Ministry of Sri Lanka. We had in-depth and thorough discussion about national bargaining efforts, about regional/national initiatives involving brands which could serve as models – such as the FOA Protocol in Indonesia, the Safety and Health Accord in Bangladesh. We also had presentations and discussions on the possibilities with regard to international institutions and international complaint mechanisms – ILO, OECD, and UN Business and Human Rights principles. The discussions were critical of the institutions and mechanisms but also concluded that we needed to use and test them so that they could become more robust.

AFWA filed a three-country complaint from unions to ILO’s Committee of Experts, to show a regional trend of attacks on FOA in the garment global supply chain. AFWA received valuable guidance from the International Department of the AFL-CIO on ILO and OECD complaints. OECD’s TUAC gave excellent training to AFWA members on OECD complaints on two occasions.

In April 2016, The Asia Brand Bargaining Group of unions (ABBG) sent a letter to H&M, signed by 18 Asian unions demanding that H&M implement payment of a living wage through a method of “an incremental negotiable

percentage payment termed “Living Wage Contribution” that progressively works towards a minimum living wage within a negotiated time frame.”

10 Regulation of Global Supply Chains

In June 2016, the ILO held its first tripartite (governments, employers, unions) discussion on the importance of regulating global supply chains. AFWA along with the Clean Clothes Campaign and United Workers Congress (USA) participated in the discussion.

As a path towards the discussion, AFWA released global supply chain reports on GAP, H&M and Walmart as part of a series called “Workers Voices from Global Supply Chain.” The reports cover Cambodia, Indonesia, India and Bangladesh. These reports were covered by 170 news outlets worldwide and had significant impact in shaping the conversation -- <http://asia.floorwage.org/workersvoices>. In particular, the New York Times published an article on all the reports. This article was mentioned by the Workers Group to bolster their arguments in the tripartite discussion and the Employers Group had to defend itself.

The AFWA commissioned a documentary on living wage, “Living Wage Now!” This was released also during the ILC and viewed by thousands of viewers.

11 Accomplishments

Asia Floor Wage Alliance shifted the terms of debate within the garment global supply chain. As mentioned above, AFWA’s emergence, unknowingly, coincided with the ILO’s initiative on Global Wage Report publications. Clearly, wages needed to take center stage but were

not receiving the urgent attention they needed. Although global North consumer activists had earlier demanded a living wage for garment workers, brands had evaded responsibility by saying that production countries were not demanding it and that it was not payable as it had no definition. AFWA, originating in Asia, and developing a cross-border living wage formulation, based on workers' needs and union discussions, put an end to these evasive tactics.

Today, garment brands have to respond to the urgent living wage question. AFWA took the living wage from a concept to a bargainable demand and prepared the conditions for global brand bargaining. The development of a concrete formulation also de-legitimised brands who claimed they were paying a living wage, when in fact they were barely paying minimum wage. AFWA demonstrated convincingly over the years the gap between minimum wage and living wage, insisting that brands need to pay the difference.

The AFW today, is a credible and legitimate benchmark for minimum living wage for garment workers in the global industry. Multi-stakeholder initiatives as well as certain brand-led organisations have adopted the AFW as a benchmark for living wage; and other benchmarks have been influenced by the AFW.

Interestingly, brand negotiations in Pakistan after the tragic Ali Enterprises fire, used the AFW figure as a reference wage to calculate the compensation of victims and their families.

12 Way Forward

In the next phase, AFWA intends to continue to create more robust social alliances for additional support for solidarity and access to labour rights; and enhance political capacity for framework agreements over global supply chains. AFWA continues to believe that a renewal of unionisation in the global south and

the deepening of these unions' participation in global union federations are necessary conditions for a genuine and representative labour movement.

As the campaign transitions to the next phase, the transnational labour network is building up a convergent organising plan and a bargaining strategy addressed to specific brands through the Asia Brand Bargaining Group.

AFWA will be pursuing active strategies to influence the ILO in a few different ways. AFWA has always been appreciative of the ILO's initial concept of "minimum living wage"; however, over the years due to lack of definition of criteria for "minimum living wage" the practical mechanism such as the Convention on Minimum Wage has slipped into the defense of statutory but poverty level minimum wages. AFWA intends to influence the evolution of criteria for a minimum living wage at the ILO and the recognition of gross violation of a legal wage as a form of economic coercion, equivalent to new forms of forced labour.

In addition, the ILO deals with firms and states within national frameworks which is inadequate to address issues in industries where global production networks (GPNs) are the dominant form. The first tripartite discussion at ILC in 2016 was an important first step. The United Nations Guiding Principles (UNGP) is also an important conceptual tool for industries structured within GPNs. AFWA is committed to influencing the evolution of an ILO mechanism for the regulation of GPNs and to effective due diligence mechanisms.

In order to build an effective bargaining strategy it is important to bring the buying practices of the brands into the ambit of negotiations to protect the employment security and wages of garment workers. This will create mechanisms to allow enhanced resources coming from the brands to be passed on to the workers through a mechanism agreed upon by local unions and suppliers in the supply chain.

The future must include brand bargaining across the global supply chain. However, AFWA believes that both campaigns and

negotiations are critical for enforcement of labour rights in GPNs. It is important to bring about convergence in strategies and actions between global, national and local unions; broadening and deepening of social alliance networks; and building trust and cooperation between the two. Global union federations, national and factory level unions, labour rights organisations, consumer campaigns and social movements can together build an enabling environment for labour rights.

In working through global networks as well as global union federations, it is important to have clarity about top-down and bottom-up approaches. Global initiatives planned and executed through multi-level involvement at all

stages, will lead to strategies that will serve the unions and workers best.

It is also important to tread carefully among "worker-ist" discursive frameworks that sideline local unions or unions in general, thinking social responsibility can be delivered by brands to workers without the leadership of representative unions or workers' collectives.

AFWA intends to collaborate with global networks and alliances to work towards a Global Wage Accord, a binding and enforceable agreement adapted to encompass the entire global production network that makes a living wage in the global garment industry a reality.

Annexure 1

Asia Floor Wage Alliance International Steering Committee

SOUTH ASIA

1. Palitha Atukorale, JSS, Sri Lanka
2. Chameli Tushari, Dabindu Collective, Sri Lanka
3. Leon Joseph Arulvasagum, National Free Trade Union, Sri Lanka
4. Ram Kishore Tripathi, HMS, India
5. Ashim Roy, MMP & NTUI, India
6. Shyam Sunder Yadav, INTUC, India
7. Anannya Bhattacharjee, GAWU, India
8. Rokeya Kabir, BNPS, Bangladesh
9. Karamat Ali, PILER, Pakistan
10. Khalid Mahmood, LEF, Pakistan

EAST ASIA

May Wong, GM, Hong Kong

SOUTH EAST ASIA

1. Iwan Kusmawan, SPN, Indonesia
2. Surya Tjandra, TURC, Indonesia
3. Emelia Yanti, GSBI, Indonesia
4. Irene Xavier, CAW, Malaysia
5. Tola Moeun, CENTRAL, Cambodia
6. Kong Athit, CCAWDU, Cambodia
7. Yang Sophorn, CATU, Cambodia

UNITED STATES & EUROPE

1. Carol Crabbe, AchAct, French-speaking Belgium
2. Christa Luginbuhl, CCC, Switzerland
3. Erica Smiley, JwJ, USA

Date: June 2017

Annexure 2

The Asia Floor Wage Alliance is an alliance of Trade Unions and labour rights ngos. Following organisations are part of the AFWA.

Bangladesh

- Action Aid-Bangladesh
- INCIDIN
- SBGKSF (Shadhin Bangla Garments Sramik-Karamchari Federation)
- NGWF (National Garment Workers' Federation)
- Karmojibi Nari
- BIGUF (Bangladesh Independent Garment Workers Union Federation)
- BCWS (Bangladesh Centre for Workers' Solidarity)
- BGIWF (Bangladesh Garment & Industrial Workers Federation)
- Bangladesh Garments Sromik Joat
- Bangladesh Institute for Development Studies
- Bangladesh Institute for Labour Studies
- Bangladesh Labour Federation (BLF)
- Jago Bangladesh Garments Sermik Federation
- Bangladesh Textiles & Garments Industries Workers League
- Garment Workers Trade Union Center
- Bangladesh Trade Union Center
- Textiles Garments Workers Federation
- National Garments Darjee Sermik Karmachari Kendra
- Bangladesh Jatiatabadi Garments Sromik Dal
- Bangladesh Poshak Shilpa Sromik Federation
- Bangladesh National Garments Sermik Karmachari League
- Bangladesh Garments Sromik Songhati
- Garments Sromik Mukta Andalon
- Shamanita Garment Sromik Federation
- Bangladesh Nari Pragati Samiti (BNPS)
- National Democratic Labour Federation

Belgium

- AchAct
- CNCD – 11.11.11

Cambodia

- Cambodia Labour Confederation (CLC)
- Cambodia Confederation of Unions (CCU)
- Centre for Alliance of Labour and Human Rights (CENTRAL)

Canada

- MSN (Maquila Solidarity Network)

Hong Kong

- HKCTU (Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions)
- Globalisation Monitor
- SACOM (Students & Scholars Against Corporate Misbehavior)

India

- HMS (Hind Mazdoor Sabha)
- INTUC (Indian National Trade Union Congress)
- NTUI (New Trade Union Initiative)
- GAWU (Garment and Allied Workers' Union)
- GATWU (Garment and Textile Workers Union)
- KGWU (Karnataka Garment Workers Union)
- GLU (Garment Labourers Union)
- GAFWU (Garment and Fashion Workers' Union)
- SLD (Society for Labour and Development)
- Fedina
- SAVE
- Cividep

Indonesia

- National Union of Workers (SPN)
- TURC (Trade Union Rights Centre)
- Federation of Independent Trade Unions (GSBI)
- LIPS Sedane
- GARTEKS
- FSBI
- SBSI-92

Malaysia

- PSWS (Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor)
- CAW (Committee for Asian Women)

Pakistan

- APTUF (All Pakistan Trade Union Federation)
- Pakistan Institute for Labour Education & Research (PILER)
- LEF (Labour Education Foundation)
- NTUF

Sri Lanka

- ALaRM network members
- JSS (Jathika Seavaka Sangamaya)
- Dabindu Collective
- National Free Trade Union
- Red Flag Union

Europe

- CCC (Clean Clothes Campaign)
- CCC networks
- Labour Behind the Label
- Action Aid-UK
- War on Want

USA

- JwJ (Jobs with Justice)
- NGA (National Guestworker Alliance)
- USAS (United Students Against Sweatshops)
- IPS (Institute for Policy Studies)
- International Labour Rights Forum (ILRF)

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