



Asia Floor Wage Alliance

Garment Labour Union (GLU) and AFWA Secure Landmark Settlement for Workers in SAPL Industries

January 2025

In October 2024, the Garment Labour Union (GLU) achieved a landmark settlement with Bangalore-based supplier SAPL Industries, ensuring a substantial payout of wages unlawfully withheld to 317 workers at the factory during the Covid-19 lockdown in 2021. This resolution marked the culmination of a three-year legal struggle, spearheaded by GLU with support from Asia Floor Wage Alliance (AFWA) before the Bangalore Industrial Tribunal.

GLU's case employed the innovative legal strategy of 'Joint Employer Liability' (JEL), developed by AFWA. This approach asserts that legal responsibility under labour law extends beyond suppliers directly employing workers to include global fashion brands exerting significant control over those workers through the production process. The case was filed against both SAPL and the brands it supplied to, including Primark, Only and Sons, and The Children's Place India Private Limited.

The case against both the supplier and brand was admitted by the Deputy Labour Commissioner (DLC) in the first instance in 2022, a historic feat in itself. Despite objections from the supplier and the involved brands, the case progressed through the DLC, the government's labour wing, and ultimately reached the Bangalore Industrial Tribunal for trial. A successful ruling leveraging the JEL strategy would have established a groundbreaking legal precedent in Asia, holding transnational corporations accountable for labour violations in production countries. Such a decision would also have significantly advanced the growing framework of global regulation on business and human rights, aligning with initiatives like the recently adopted Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive framework. A detailed explanation behind the theory of JEL, and the implications



it has for global brand accountability can be found in AFWA's 2021 publication on the subject, which is available [here](#).

Anannya Bhattacharjee, International Coordinator of AFWA commented: *"A major factor influencing SAPL's decision to settle was their concern about setting an international precedent through the JEL case. They were apprehensive about the broader implications, including the genuine risk of the brand reducing orders or severing ties altogether if held legally accountable. The structural shift introduced by a framework like JEL, which redefines the liability of global fashion brands on an international scale, is significant."*

Saroja, General Secretary of GLU added: *"This is a massive win for workers at SAPL and a powerful example of what can be achieved through innovative legal thinking and strategy."*

AFWA and GLU continue to actively pursue similar cases involving withheld lockdown wages using the JEL strategy in Bangalore courts, with three cases still pending. They call on both suppliers and brands to uphold their obligations under international and domestic law by ensuring these workers receive their rightful wages.