



## **Asia Floor Wage Alliance**

### **May Day 2026 Statement: From Global Crises to Rising Costs of Living, to Gender-Based Violence and Harassment - Garment Workers and Unions Demand Accountability**

***May 2026***

Solidarity Greetings on May Day!

International Workers' Day stands as a testament to the enduring struggles and collective power of working people across the world. On this day, the Asia Floor Wage Alliance (AFWA) stands in solidarity with workers and trade unions across Asia. Our struggles are interconnected, and our strength lies in building power across borders.

The garment industry, driven by global fashion brands' extreme greed, is emblematic of working people's hardships and resistance. Garment supply chains are sustained by systemic exploitation of women workers whose labor drives the industry. Women workers in garment production countries in Asia face entrenched injustice: poverty wages, wage theft, gender-based violence and harassment, and the routine denial of fundamental rights. This is not incidental – subjugation of women workers fuels this highly profitable industry whose revenues are primarily captured by fashion brands from the Global North.

#### **Crisis, Conflict, and the Cost of Survival**

Today, this exploitative system is under increasing strain not only from economic instability, but from a global crisis driven by escalating war, militarism, and trade weaponization. Conflicts driven by geopolitical power struggles and profit interests are tearing apart communities while fueling global economic disruption. Global production is being actively restructured around geopolitical tensions and fractured global trade systems. These measures have disrupted supply chains, increased production costs, and deepened uncertainty for garment production countries.

Wars and trade conflicts have destabilized oil supply routes and global shipping networks, driving up the cost of transport, food, and basic survival for workers across garment-producing countries. The impact reaches far beyond conflict zones: economies are destabilized, livelihoods are threatened, and workers are pushed further into precarity. In this climate of instability, global fashion brands have acted to protect their own profits: cancelling or reducing orders, delaying payments, and shifting sourcing unpredictably. The burden of this instability is pushed downward onto suppliers and workers, while brand accountability remains absent.

#### **From Poverty to Desperation: Workers Across Garment-Producing Countries**



Across Asia, the impact of this crisis is already evident. Factories are closing or reducing operations; layoffs and wage theft are increasing, and production pressure is intensifying for those who remain employed. Employers are reducing working hours, cutting jobs, and shifting workers into more insecure forms of employment.

Rising fuel and energy costs are disrupting production across major garment hubs. Power shortages, increased freight costs, and delays in raw material shipments are disrupting manufacturing cycles. These disruptions are increasing the risk of order cancellations and potential future job losses, while workers face rising food costs and growing anxiety about their livelihoods.

The cost of living has risen sharply due to increases in fuel, electricity, transport and food prices. Migrant workers are unable to meet their living costs and are being forced to return to their villages.

### **Intensification of Gender-Based Violence and Harassment (GBVH)**

In times of crisis, women workers are disproportionately affected, as they are often the first to be dismissed and the least protected under these conditions. We learned during the Covid-19 pandemic that GBVH escalates during crises due to unbearable economic, psychological and physical stress.

This time, it is no different.

Crisis only intensifies GBVH which is already systemic across garment supply chains, enabled by industry conditions that concentrate power in the hands of brands and suppliers while limiting workers' ability to organize and assert their rights.

### **We Stand in Solidarity**

AFWA stands in solidarity with women leaders who courageously fight back for a safer and more dignified workplace; and who work hard to build a strong labour movement that serves all workers. We remember and honor Dolores Huerta and all survivors who have come forward to speak out against Cesar Chavez. Movements are built by workers, especially women, whose labor, leadership, and courage sustain them. There can be no liberation for one without liberation for all.

Today, we stand with women workers and their families, and trade unions who are fighting for Justice for Pushpalatha. Pushpalatha, a young woman garment worker, died in October 2025 due to her working conditions - medical professionals confirmed that timely intervention could have saved her life. She was employed in a factory operated by Brandix in Sri Lanka, that supplies major global brands, including Victoria's Secret.

### **We Refuse to Bear the Cost**



Workers cannot be made to bear the cost of global conflict and economic instability. During the COVID-19 pandemic, garment workers and unions demanded accountability from global fashion brands who abandoned all responsibility and outsourced their risks to suppliers and workers.

This crisis is no different. We learned that workers can survive crises if they work in safe and dignified workplaces and earn living wages which help them save and shore up strength to weather the storm.

Garment workers and their unions have already demonstrated what is effective in the fight against GBVH and injustice at the workplace. The [Dindigul Agreement](#) in India and the [Central Java Agreement](#) in Indonesia have demonstrated the importance of enforceable mechanisms led by women workers and they have [been proven](#) to prevent and address GBVH and oppressive working conditions on the factory floor.

Fashion brands and suppliers must:

- Sign binding and enforceable agreements to eliminate GBVH
- Guarantee the right to Freedom of Association, including protection from retaliation, intimidation, and dismissal.
- Ensure safe and dignified working conditions
- Align pricing and sourcing practices with living wage standards
- Deliver justice and accountability in cases like Pushpalatha's

We reaffirm the power of workers organizing across borders.

We reaffirm the leadership of women workers.

We reaffirm that solidarity is not symbolic—it is the foundation of our collective strength.