Asia Floor Wage Alliance

AFWA Stands with Trade Unions in Bangladesh Rejecting BDT 17,000 Minimum Wage for Garment Workers

27 November 2026

The Asia Floor Wage Alliance (AFWA) stands in solidarity with our union partners in Bangladesh and strongly support their call for reconsideration of the BDT 17,000 minimum wage recommended by the Wage Board for Bangladesh's garment workers on 25 November 2026.

Garment workers in Bangladesh are the driving force behind the country's largest export sector, but they continue to shoulder gruelling hours and demanding working conditions while facing escalating living costs. Our Bangladesh union partners have highlighted steep increases in necessities, such as food, housing, healthcare, education, and transportation, which have left workers unable to meet their families' essential needs. With further instability and new tariffs on the horizon workers urgently needed a decent wage. A minimum wage set at BDT 17,000 fails to reflect economic realities on the ground and falls far short of a decent wage that allows workers and their households to live with dignity.

Across our global network, we know that sustainable industries and long-term economic resilience are built on decent work and living wages, not poverty-level pay. When workers can afford adequate food, shelter, healthcare, and schooling, their health, stability, and productivity are strengthened, supporting genuine economic progress for the sector and the nation as a whole.

Yet the period surrounding the wage negotiations has been marked by mass unrest, factory closures, and a pattern of repression against those exercising their fundamental rights. Factories have shut down, leaving workers without income at precisely the moment they can least afford it. Our partners have further documented the filing of false criminal cases against workers and trade union leaders, and acts of intimidation and repression that have created a pervasive climate of fear. Workers who speak out about wages risk losing their livelihoods, their liberty, and their safety. This repression strikes at the heart of freedom of association, and no wage process conducted under such conditions can be regarded as free, fair, or representative of workers' voices. Both the Government of Bangladesh and employers must immediately withdraw false cases, cease retaliation against workers and union leaders, and guarantee a safe environment in which workers can organise and bargain without fear; fashion brands must use their leverage to demand the same.

Fashion brands also bear a shared responsibility. The wage crisis in Bangladesh cannot be separated from the structure of the global garment industry, in which powerful fashion

brands dictate prices, volumes, and timelines while pushing costs and risks down onto suppliers and workers. Aggressive purchasing practices have compressed factory margins to the point where suppliers claim they cannot pay above the bare minimum, while brands treat the legal minimum wage as a ceiling rather than a floor. International norms are clear on this point: the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the OECD's due diligence guidance for responsible business conduct, and emerging mandatory due diligence legislation all make clear that brands must address wages that leave workers unable to live in dignity anywhere in their supply chains.

Repression is not the only way the process has fallen short. AFWA echoes Bangladesh unions' demand that wage-setting genuinely takes into account workers' cost of living and living standards, inflation, the nature and hazards of the work, and broader socio-economic conditions.

We urge the Government of Bangladesh and the Wage Board to heed AFWA-Bangladesh's call to reconsider the recommended BDT 17,000 figure without delay and establish a fair minimum wage that honours the contributions and fundamental rights of Bangladesh's garment workers – and alongside this, to withdraw the false cases against workers and trade union leaders and end the repression that is silencing them. We also urge fashion brands sourcing from Bangladesh to support garment workers' demand for a fair minimum wage that reflects their actual household needs and ensures a dignified standard of living, and to protect workers from retaliation by demanding the withdrawal of false cases, opposing factory closures used to punish organising, and making clear that repression in their supply chain carries commercial consequences.