Asia Floor Wage Alliance - Bangladesh

RMG Industry Trade Unions Demand Minimum Wage Increase

November 2026

Thousands of ready-made-garment (RMG) industry workers in Bangladesh have once again taken to the streets to **demand better pay.** Currently receiving a meagre minimum wage of BDT 12,500, which remains drastically insufficient against cost-of-living surges and severe economic inflation, garment workers in Dhaka staged mass protests last week despite being met with state violence and brutal arrests.

Garment workers are the undisputed backbone of Bangladesh's economy. The RMG sector accounts for over 80% of the **nation's total export earnings**, contributes more than **11% to the GDP**, and employs over 4.6 million workers, the majority of whom **are women**. These workers have powered Bangladesh's remarkable economic transformation over the past two decades, pushing projected 2026 per capita GDP to USD 2,886, surpassing both Pakistan and India, and making the country one of **South Asia's prominent economic success stories**. However, high inflation and slowing GDP growth (projected at just 3.6% this year compared to India's 7%) are putting this progress under severe strain. While export revenues and factory profits continue to grow, the benefits of this economic rise have not reached the workers who built it. Instead, garment workers remain trapped in debt, unable to keep up with rising living costs or afford basic necessities for their families.

Kazi Ruhul Amin, Steering Committee Chair, AFWA Bangladesh, and General Secretary of Bangladesh Garment and Sweater Workers Trade Union Centre, has stated that "Workers can no longer be expected to survive on poverty wages while the cost of living continues to rise. A fair wage is not a privilege or a concession; it is a fundamental labour right. The commitment to implement the revised minimum wage from December 2026, secured through the united struggle of workers, must be honoured without delay. Workers will not accept further delays, broken promises or wages that condemn them to poverty."

Echoing these sentiments, AFWA's Bangladesh Country Coordinator, Arifur Rahman, added that "the ongoing wage movement of garment workers is not merely a demand for wage increases; it reflects workers' struggle for dignity, fair rights, and the crisis of meeting their basic living needs. We positively view the Minimum Wage Board members' commitment to announcing and implementing the new wage structure by December. However, given past experiences, workers naturally remain sceptical about the implementation of these commitments. We believe it is essential to determine a fair and living wage based on workers' actual living costs and needs, implement it from December, and ensure that workers receive it with their January salary. The government, employers, and all relevant stakeholders must play a responsible role in addressing workers'

legitimate demands. At the same time, workers' unity, collective strength, and the democratic right to protest must be respected to ensure a swift, just, and dignified wage settlement."

According to the 2026 Consumption Survey that takes into account workers' actual household expenditure – it is very clear that workers need at least an additional wage of 30,000 BDT to meet their household expenses. Considering the productivity gains in the industry and the projected 2026 per capita GDP to USD 2,886, and if 60% of those employed in the garment industry are women - 37,000 BDT is a reasonable amount according to AFWA's own living wage estimate of BDT 62,417. We support a collective consensus-building process within the trade union fraternity and believe that the best possible wage outcome should be achieved within the range of 30,000 BDT–37000 BDT.

AFWA stands in solidarity with the labour representatives on the Wage Board, trade unions and the broader garment workers' movement in their collective struggle for a just and meaningful wage increase. We support a collective, consensus-driven process that brings together workers' demands and the realities of the sector to secure the best possible wage outcome.

Just as labour unions and garment workers mobilised during previous minimum wage negotiations in 2013, 2018, and 2023, AFWA stands united today to demand a minimum wage increase that reflects current economic realities.

We call on global brands, manufacturers, and the government to respect the rights of workers, recognise their critical contributions to the global supply chain, and immediately agree to these reasonable and vital demands.