

# Press release

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Dhaka, Bangladesh 30th of March 2017

## **S&D MEPs visit Bangladesh: growth and development in the garment sector**

Bangladesh has achieved a remarkable track record of economic growth with a corresponding rise in human rights development in the past decades. The garment sector, which was the focus of our visit, has played an important role in that growth and we can see that there have been improvements in both buildings and work place safety since the Rana Plaza tragedy four years ago.

The European Union is currently examining the whole issue of fairness in the garment supply chains worldwide. The ACCORD and ALLIANCE are encouraging examples of what can be achieved when companies, governments and workers pool efforts to improve standards.

The EU is a strong partner of Bangladesh, as reflected in our robust trade relations underpinned by the Everything But Arms (EBA) market access regime. The EBA has among its core values the respect for human rights and labour rights. In this context, we note that Bangladesh was mentioned under a special paragraph in the International Labour Conference (ILO) in Geneva in June 2016. The ILO called on Bangladesh to address four issues: full alignment of respectively, the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) draft law, the Bangladesh Labour Act (BLA), with the UN core Labour Convention modalities for establishing trade unions and the right of trade unions to operate freely. It is important that these issues are addressed before the 18th May review of the Sustainability Compact and the June annual International Labour Conference.

Since our arrival in Dhaka, we raised this matter with the speaker of the Parliament, the Minister of Commerce, the State Minister of Labour and Employment, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), the brands and labour representatives as well as the ILO. We also had the honour to be received by Her Excellency, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. We felt a readiness and good will from all parties to engage on this issue and are hopeful that this will translate into concrete progress before the May review of the Sustainability Compact in Dhaka and the Geneva ILO conference in mid-June.

As members of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, our engagement with Bangladesh, as with other countries, is guided by our core values, where respect for human rights and labour rights - in particular freedom of association and collective bargaining - rank high. That is why the full implementation of the Sustainability Compact is so important in our view.

### **The S&D MEPs who took part in the visit to Bangladesh were:**

- **MEP Arne Lietz**, member of the committee on development (DEVE), the committee on foreign affairs (AFET) and the S&D's co-rapporteur on the garment report
- **MEP Linda McAvan**, the EP's chair on the committee on development (DEVE)
- **MEP Norbert Neuser**, the S&D's co-ordinator on the committee on development (DEVE)
- **MEP Agnes Jongerius**, member of the committee on employment and social affairs (EMPL), and the committee on international trade (INTA)