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**Twenty-five organizations call on Canadian companies to sign
Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh**

Twenty-five human rights, faith, women's, teacher, student, community, overseas development and trade union organizations have signed an Open Letter calling on Canadian retailers and brands to sign the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh. To date, only one Canadian company, Loblaw (owner of Joe Fresh), has signed the Accord.

The companies to which the letter has been sent – Canadian Tire (owner of Mark's and Sport Chek), Giant Tiger, Hudson's Bay Company, Sears Canada, Walmart, YM Inc. (owner of Suzy Shier, Stitches, Bluenotes, Urban Planet, Sirens) – have so far refused to sign the legally-binding Accord. Instead, they have joined a voluntary, company-controlled initiative, the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety.

"The Rana Plaza disaster, in which over 1,100 workers lost their lives, should have been a wake-up call for Canadian retailers and brands that have clothes made in Bangladesh, but it seems most Canadian companies are asleep at the wheel," says Lynda Yanz, Executive Director of the Maquila Solidarity Network. "To prevent further disasters from happening, we need to go beyond company-controlled factory audits that have failed to detect and remedy safety hazards over the past decade," says Yanz.

"When Canadians shop for holiday gifts, we want assurances that the clothes we buy were not made in death traps where the workers lives are at risk," says Paul Moist, National President, Canadian Union of Public Employees. "Unfortunately, Canadian Alliance-member companies are not providing consumers credible evidence that their apparel products were made in safe factories and under decent conditions."

The Open Letter criticizes the Alliance factory inspection program for not being sufficiently independent, for not publicly disclosing the findings from individual factory inspections, and for failing to give workers and worker representatives an active role in the detection and remediation of hazardous working conditions.

In contrast, the Accord, which has been signed by Global and Bangladeshi unions and over 120 retailers and brands in more than 20 countries in Europe, North America and Asia, provides for independent factory inspections, public reports on the findings of those inspections and the corrective action taken, health and safety training for workers and management personnel, a mechanism for workers to make anonymous complaints, and the right of workers to refuse unsafe work. Under the Accord, signatory companies must underwrite the cost of factory upgrades.

-30-

To access the letter go to: <http://en.maquilasolidarity.org/sites/maquilasolidarity.org/files/Bangladesh-Safety-Joint-letter-to-Canadian-companies-Dec-17-2013.pdf>

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