

Betreff: Images on New York Times about fire at garment  
Datum: Mon, 3 Dec 2012 04:52:39 -0800 (PST)

Dear Monica and all comrades of the international World Women's Conference process  
I have shared some of my experiences about fire at Tajreen Fashion garment. This writing is a part of New York Times interview. Hope it'll help you to get an idea about the sad and tragic fire. I have added the New York Times lens blog link also.

<http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/29/fighting-hopelessness-amid-ashes/>

Fighting Hopelessness Amid Ashes  
lens.blogs.nytimes.com

Her interest in human rights and labor issues in Bangladesh led Taslima Akhter to photography. This week, as she has four times before, she raced to a factory fire that killed workers left with no way out.

Pls see below my writing.  
In solidarity  
Taslima

Fire at Garment: Tajreen fashion  
My Experiences:  
Taslima Akhter  
28th November 2012

They locked me, They burnt me alive  
I don't want any more press statements  
Why is the factory a prison?  
I do not accept having to work under lockup conditions  
I DO NOT! ( Lyric of a song by Kafil Ahmed)

Fire broke out into the garment near about 6.30pm on 24th November. I arrived at Tajreen fashion garment near about 4 and half hours later at 11pm. When I reached, I saw thousands of workers, and many people gathering near the factory with tensed look. They were waiting for the end of fire fighters work; to look for their relatives, friends and co-workers. At that time I heard that only 7 or 9 workers died. Many media journalists and reporters were also there.

After taking some photos I went to some houses behind the factory that were also affected by fire. I tried to find the victims families. Then there was no electricity at the area. In a very scary environment, everybody was tensed.

I went to a barrack where workers families live and saw many workers talking about their missing relatives, wives, daughters, fathers and brothers. Lately, I found a house of a worker named Moushumi (16) and her father sitting near her dead body. He couldn't say much but informed that Moushumi's mother was also missing.

I went to Julekha's place. She lost her husband Abdul bari (35). Julekha was crying and saying that her husband called her when the fire broke out in the factory and said 'Pardon me, my dear, I am going to die'. Abdul Bari, Julekhas husband was a sewing operator. I saw another dead body kept lying on the corridor of near by school. Then I went to the hospitals to look for the other victims. There I heard the bodies were taken to the Police station.

Going to the police station at 3 am I found three dead bodies, two lying on the backseat of a broken micro-bus and 1 on a pick up in front of the police station. Still then the bodies were unidentified. Police and others said that they jumped from the factory to avoid the fire and died. I could not look at their face.

It was the most tragic and sad event I had ever seen in my life. I felt too difficult to take photographs in this situation. It was a tremendous mental shock and pressure for me to take photograph. But I took photos because I felt I should take photographs to show the cruelty with the cheapest workers of the world, who bring 78% foreign currency as export income in year, who work dawn to dusk only with the minimum wage of BDT 3000 taka ( Near about \$ 37), who have no life safety in an unsecured working place.

I went into the factory on the very next day 25th November morning at 11am. Before being there I got the news that the death toll was already 111 declared by government. But the relatives and other sources are claiming that it is more than 111. Still hundreds of relatives looking for their missing family members who worked at Tajreen.

It's very hard to explain my feeling. I have seen four big fires at garment factories in last three years. It's not an easy experience for me. When I was just entering at the factory, fire fighters were still carrying out white dead body bags from the factory. When I was passing the stairs of nine-storied building, still then I could feel the heat of the fire. There were only one wide stairs for workers. I saw pieces of broken glasses all around the stairs. I saw many sandals, small bags, identity cards and tiffin carriers here and there at different floors. I saw many glasses of windows were broken, through which they tried to jump or tried to save their lives. But all of them were not lucky enough. I imagined how the workers passed the last moments of their life. How did they feel? When the fire was crawling, when they tried but found no way to save their life, what their feeling was? I felt not only the labor of the garment workers of our country is the cheapest but their lives also to the factory owners, state and buyers. Workers life has no value to the profit makers and state. Why can't they take proper initiatives for saving workers life and secure the factory? Many questions were haunting me and I felt so hopeless. Thousands workers worked at Tajreen Fashions but there were no security of their life.

More than hundred dead bodies rescued by the fire fighters were taken to the near by school. All the building corridors around the school field were filled with white dead body bags. From the morning thousands of people were gathering there to find their relatives among the dead bodies. Relatives came to find out their closest persons dead body but many couldn't find out because most of the bodies were charred, like coal, like skeleton they had nothing to recognize. Some bodies didn't have the whole figure. It was hard to look at the bodies or to the faces of the dead workers. Still relatives were going from one to another.

Later on all unidentified bodies were sent to morgue for DNA test. I went to hospital morgue and saw the piled up dead workers at mourge. It was a very difficult experience for me, everywhere the smell of dead body. We couldn't go so near to the dead body. Most of the bodies' were damaged and become ashes. And on 27th the bodies were buried at Jurain grave yard. 52 unidentified dead bodies of workers buried at Jurain grave yard.

I think the owners and government they think that these workers are very cheap; they don't need enough facilities and security at factory. Owners think they can control workers emotion only by giving 1200 dollar after their death. If any occurrence happens at the factory the owners usually get insurance money and other benefits but workers get nothing. Owners think they don't need to ensure security for these cheap workers; they don't want to waste money on them. They only want to exploit them with minimum cost and want to earn high profit by them.

This fire is really a major one. It was breaking my nerve down. And the story is all the same. Workers were locked behind the Iron Gate and did not get any escape from the fire. Nobody knows the real number of victims. Many are still missing but bodies not found, turned into ashes. There are no basic rights for workers, even the right to demand the rights of trade union. Our garment sector is a very developing sector. No doubt if we want to develop this sector properly we should be careful about workers rights. So all communities, national and international should be aware for workers basic rights. If we can't ensure this we can't stop the same story again and again. And we need to make a strong international solidarity to protect workers right.

Yes, Tajreen garment where the fire broke out, they were making apparels for wall mart and Teddy Smith. I think not only American consumers; all consumers in the world should know what the actual story is, behind the production of their clothes. Bangladeshi garment workers are the cheapest labor in the world. They earn only about 37\$ dollar as minimum wage for a month. And they work in an unsecured working condition. Not only American but all international buyers give low price for buying Bangladeshi products. But they sell those items in high rate. US and other governments earn a large duty with a high rate for garment products. The foreign companies are making a lot more profit than our national owners. All these are with cost of the cheap labor and the lives. So US and other European governments should reduce high rate of duty and increase the rate of product that will be helpful for increasing the workers minimum wage and securing working environment.

Knowing the real story all consumers should raise voice against making unjust profit by exploitation. And demand more facilities and wage for the workers who contribute the most for production.

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Updates:

Last 1st December workers and family members of dead workers gathered in front of garment to collect their wages but owner did not pay. And police attack on workers protest, police fired rubber bullet and tear gas to make scattered the protest. Last three days, workers protest spread all over the area, near Tajreen fashion at Ashulia. Everyday there are many protest going on in Ashulia and Dhaka in our country by Workers organization, Student organization, teacher-intellectual, cultural activist, political activist and political parties also. Most of the left leaning organization and political party are organizing protest.

They demand:

- Publishing the actual number of death
- Judicial inquiry into the fire incident
- Immediate arrest and exemplary punishment of Tazreen owner Delwar Hossain
- 10 lack BDT as compensation of each family that lost a member in a blaze
- Proper medical medical treatment and compensation for the injured