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Worker Voices from the Asian Walmart Garment Supply Chain: A Report on Gender Based Violence to the 2018 International Labour Organization

A global coalition of trade unions, worker rights and human rights organizations, which includes [Asia Floor Wage Alliance \(AFWA\)](#), [CENTRAL Cambodia](#), and [Global Labor Justice](#) released a groundbreaking factory level research report today detailing gender based violence in Walmart's Asian garment supply chain and are also asking for [immediate action](#) be taken by Walmart to end the violence and harassment that women garment workers are forced to endure daily.

After significant initiative from trade unions, the International Labour Organization (ILO) will convene to set international labor standards on [gender based violence](#). Trade union leaders from around the world along with governments and business will meet to discuss the historic opportunity to create a global standard protecting women across sectors. This report has been prepared to inform this dialogue and to make sure the experience and recommendations of low wage women workers and the sectors and supply chains that rely on them are uplifted in order to create a strong framework guided by the leadership of trade unions and worker organizations that will provide employers, multinational enterprises, and governments a blueprint for eliminating gender based violence in the workplace.

The [report](#) includes an investigation of gender-based violence in the Walmart garment supplier factories conducted between January 2018 and May 2018 in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Phnom Penh, Cambodia; and West Java, Indonesia. The research seeks to understand the spectrum of gender based violence and associated risk factors; and to use this information to address gender based violence through an ongoing approach that incorporates training on workplace violence as well as national and international level advocacy. The report builds on a [2016 report](#) documenting human rights violations in Walmart's garment global supply chain and [five tribunals](#) held by the Asia Floor Wage on the sector overall.

Women workers [reported sexual harassment and violence](#); and industrial discipline practices, including physical violence, verbal abuse, coercion, threats and retaliation, and routine deprivations of liberty including forced overtime. These are not isolated incidents, gender based violence in the Walmart garment supply chains is a direct result of how Walmart conducts business.

Sulatana, a former production-line manager in a Walmart supplier factory in Dhaka, Bangladesh shares her experience with sexual harassment and retaliation:

"He flirted with me, he would touch me on the shoulder or touch me on the head. I tried to ignore him. I thought if I showed no interest, he would stop. It didn't work. He offered me a salary increase and a promotion if I agreed. When I did not, he threatened to fire me. I was anxious and afraid. I skipped work the next day... The police refused to receive my complaint on the grounds that I had no authentic proof. A few days later, . . . the General Manager me to his office and asked me to resign immediately. When I approached Human Resources, I was told that the General Manager's decision was final."

Shahida, a 26-year-old sewing machine operator in a Walmart supplier factory in Dhaka, Bangladesh details the targeted verbal abuse women workers experience in order to avoid being paid workplace benefits:

“I began working at this factory in April 2013. I earned a good reputation as a skilled and dedicated worker. The line-chief and supervisor were happy with my work. After completing my fourth year at the factory, they reversed their attitude toward me. They shouted at me and bullied me. They called me names. I reported this to the factory manager, but he responded by raising my production targets. I couldn’t manage to work this way. In March 2018, before reaching my fifth year, I quit the job. It was exactly what they wanted. I resigned and they did not pay me the gratuity I had earned because they said I had resigned from the job myself.”

A woman worker from a former Walmart supplier factory in Kingsland Garment, Jakarta, Indonesia describes the physical impact of working long hours, seated, in a poorly ventilated factory:

“At work I’m facing stomach pain, digestion and nose problems from sitting long hours working so much overtime, and working so many days. But sometimes I just have to forget my sickness because I have no money. I have to be the rock in the family.”

Anannya Bhattacharjee, secretariat of AFWA says, “Walmart, the trend-setter for lean supply chain management relies on women workers’ gender-based exploitation in their supply chains to maximize their profits. To eliminate gender based violence in supply chains, Walmart and other brands must take responsibility on their supply chains. It is also fundamental that Walmart and other brands respect the freedom of association and collective bargaining that allow women workers to be change agents in the global economy.

“The movement for dignity and equity at work for all women is global”, says Jennifer (JJ) Rosenbaum, U.S. Director of Global Labor Justice. “Women in the U.S. shouldn’t stop at holding Walmart and U.S. corporations accountable for what happens in their U.S. retail stores and warehouses. We must also demand accountability along their global production networks.”

Tola Meun, Executive Director of CENTRAL says, “Gender based violence is a daily reality for women garment workers driven to meet unrealistic production targets in Walmart supply chains. Most of these cases are not reported due to fear of retaliation in the workplace.”

In response to the reports, the Women’s Leadership Committee of the Asia Floor Wage Alliance is asking Walmart for [three immediate action steps](#):

1. Publicly support and commit to proactively implement an ILO Convention Recommendation on Gender Based Violence that includes the recommendations from the Asia Floor Wage Alliance and partners.
2. Meet with Asia regional meeting (s) organized by the Asia Floor Wage Women’s Leadership Committee in the next three months to discuss the supply chain findings and next steps.
3. Proactively work with the Asia Floor Wage Alliance to pilot women’s committees in factories that eliminate gender based violence and discrimination from the supplier factories.

Walmart is preparing various activities for its [shareholder meeting next week](#) and released a [report on global responsibility](#) earlier this year. A substantive response from Walmart has yet to be received after the reports coupled with [requests for action](#) were sent to Walmart the morning of May 23rd, 2018.

Walmart workers at U.S. retail stores with the [Organization United for Respect at Walmart](#) (OUR) announced support from the [#TimesUp](#) Legal Defense Fund to support litigation against [Walmart for sexual harassment](#).

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[Global Labor Justice](#) (GLJ) is a US based strategy hub supporting transnational collaboration among worker and migrant organizations to expand labor rights and new forms of bargaining on global value chains and international labor migration corridors.

[Asia Floor Wage Alliance](#) (AFWA) was officially formed in 2006 and includes more than 76 organizations, including garment industry trade unions, NGOs, consumer groups and research institutes from more than 17 countries from across Asia, Europe and North America.

[CENTRAL](#) (The Center for Alliance of Labor & Human Rights) is a local Cambodian NGO. The organization empowers Cambodian working people to demand transparent and accountable governance for labor and human rights through legal aid and other appropriate means.