

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 1, 2013

President Barack H. Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

The mounting death toll in Bangladesh's garment industry, with the collapse last week of the Rana Plaza, underscores the clear need for immediate action to address the crisis in working conditions and worker rights in that country. This most recent tragedy repeats what has become a serious and disturbing pattern in Bangladesh – labor and workplace laws are flouted and workers' safety and rights denied in the pursuit of lucrative export opportunities primarily to Europe and the United States. And workers – most of them young women and mothers – are left to pay the terrible consequences with their lives.

We must use all possible tools to address this situation. The Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) is one tool that we understand your Administration is already considering and we support its robust use. Labor eligibility criteria – in particular the requirement that beneficiary countries be taking steps to afford internationally recognized worker rights – were included in GSP in 1984 specifically to ensure that worker rights and working conditions are a central consideration and that the benefits of expanded trade are broadly shared.

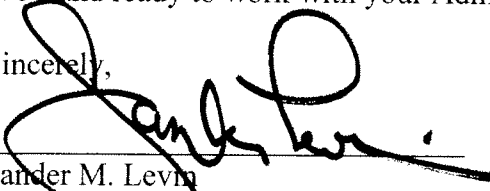
But action under GSP alone is insufficient to address the monumental challenges in Bangladesh's garment sector. GSP benefits do not extend to most apparel and therefore changes in GSP do not directly impact that sector. To assure safe working conditions and sufficient pay to support a family, there must be a framework to help ensure that the purchasers of garments from Bangladesh do not source based solely on the cheapest price without regard to the conditions under which the garments are made.

European and American retailers purchase two-thirds of Bangladeshi garment production. We urge your Administration to lead an effort, together with the European Union, to bring together key European and American retailers that have sourced from Bangladesh to adopt a common response leading to a universal standard guaranteeing basic workplace safety and fundamental worker rights, whether garments are produced by direct contracting or subcontracting. That response must also include effective monitoring. We would note that there are already some proposals – for example, the Building and Fire Safety Agreement being advanced by a number of leading non-governmental organizations and unions – that address some of these key elements.

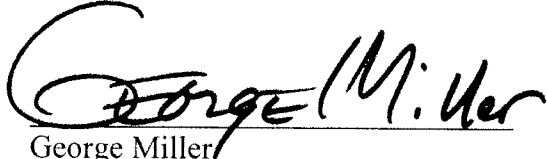
To move the process forward, we believe the Administration and its European counterparts should convene representatives of the European and American retailers, the Bangladeshi garment industry, garment workers, their unions and the government, the International Labor Organization, and non-governmental organizations to facilitate the development of a concrete plan of action to address the range of issues relating to working conditions and worker rights in the garment sector.

We stand ready to work with your Administration on this important matter.

Sincerely,



Sander M. Levin  
Ranking Member  
Ways and Means Committee



George Miller  
Senior Democratic Member  
Committee on Education and the Workforce