

# Cross Party Group on Bangladesh

## Cross Party Group on Fair Trade

15 November 2023 1pm online and in person  
(CR3)

Minute

Present

MSPs

Colin Smyth MSP (CPG on Fair Trade)

Foyso! Choudhury MSP (CPG on Fair Trade and CPG on Bangladesh)

Evelyn Tweed MSP (CPG on Bangladesh)

Invited guests

Mr Mohammad Ghayas Uddin, Community Crafts, Saidpur, Bangladesh

Mr Mohammad Shabbir Afridi, Community Crafts, Saidpur, Bangladesh

MD Rahman, Bangladesh Students' Association

Badrul Hussain, Bangladesh Students' Association

Prof Shamina Haque, Aberdeen University Business School

Cllr Nurul Hoque Ali, Aberdeen City Council

Pamela Abbott, Aberdeen University (online)

Non-MSP Group Members

Prof M Azizul Islam, Aberdeen University Business School (CPG on Bangladesh)

Martin Rhodes, Scottish Fair Trade Forum (CPG Fair Trade)

Kiera Williams, Scottish Fair Trade Forum (online) (CPG Fair Trade)

Catherine Newman, Scottish Fair Trade Forum (CPG Fair Trade)

Nduzani Zaya, Scottish Fair Trade Forum (online) (CPG Fair Trade)

Karena Jarvie, Perth and Kinross Fair Trade Group (CPG Fair Trade)

Russel Salton, Edinburgh Fair Trade Steering Group (CPG Fair Trade)

Rachel Farey, One World Shop (CPG Fair Trade)

Jane Forster, Balerno Fair Trade Group (CPG Fair Trade)

Andy Ashcroft, Scottish Fair Trade Forum (online) (CPG on Fair Trade)

Jeanette McIvor, Queensferry Fair Trade Group (online) (CPG on Fair Trade)

Parveen Ishaq, ELREC (CPG on Bangladesh)

Philippa Jeffery, Rainbow Turtle (online) (CPG on Fair Trade)

Charles Sim (East Ayrshire Fair Trade Group) (CPG on Fair Trade)

Yasmina Ferrigan, Hadeel/Palcrafts (online) (CPG on Fair Trade)

# Apologies

Pam Maxwell, North Ayrshire Fair Trade Group  
Anne Walsh, West Lothian Fair Trade Group  
Sarah Boyack MSP  
Miles Briggs MSP  
Mercedes Villalba MSP

## Agenda item 1

Colin Smyth MSP, Convenor, Cross Party Group on Fair Trade, welcomed people to the meeting including those attending online and those attending in person. He noted that as this was a joint meeting, no minutes from either CPG were being presented for approval but that those minutes would be referred to the next meeting of the relevant CPG.

## Agenda item 2

Colin Smyth introduced the first guest speaker: Prof Aziz Islam, Chair in Accountancy and Professor in Sustainability Accounting & Transparency at the University of Aberdeen Business School. Prof Islam outlined some of his research on the practices of UK high street retailers buying textile products from Bangladesh. He highlighted the importance of the textile industry to Bangladesh and also how workers in the industry can be poorly paid and exploited.

Prof Islam had carried out a survey of 1,000 suppliers in 2021 which is a sample of 25% of all suppliers in Bangladesh supplying goods to brands based in the global north. He discovered a number of unfair practices including: cancellation of orders; reducing the price paid for goods already contracted; refusing to pay for goods dispatched/in production; and delayed payment for goods already delivered by more than 3 months.

These unfair practices have contributed to job losses; wage cuts; unpaid overtime; forced labour; verbal and sexual abuse.

Prof Islam commented that legislation so far had not resolved these issues and highlighted Transform Trade's campaign for a Fashion Watchdog.

## Agenda item 3

Mr Mohammad Ghayas Uddin, Community Crafts, Saidpur, Bangladesh, then spoke. He acknowledged the existence of the problems highlighted by Prof Islam along with the problems caused by climate change for the workers in the Bangladesh textile industry and their communities.

Mr Ghayas set out how he had been involved with Fair Trade for over 40 years to assist textile workers to get fair treatment and payment. He also set out how he had

set up Community Crafts, Saidpur, to give employment opportunities for marginalised women.

The company had originally produced jute goods but now had gone on to make products from upcycled sari material.

He highlighted that his company had supplied the One World Shop in Edinburgh for a number of years and he had come to Edinburgh with his colleague, Mr Mohammad Shabbir Afridi, to be part of the shop's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. He also reported that his visit to Edinburgh was part of a wider series of visits to buyers and potential buyers in the UK and the need to get more sales for Fair Trade products. He finished by playing a short film showing the work of Community Crafts.

## Agenda item 4

Foyso Choudhury MSP and Colin Smyth MSP then chaired a discussion on the presentations. There was a question about how best to support Fair Trade and Mr Ghayas responded that consumers had to ask for Fair Trade products and support businesses that sold Fair Trade products. There was a question from Evelyn Tweed MSP in relation to what more parliamentarians could do to help. She indicated that the delegation from the CPG on Bangladesh would shortly be visiting Bangladesh and would raise the issues around the behaviour of the unfair practices of buyers from major retail businesses. Cllr Nurul Hoque Ali highlighted the problems for public bodies in implementing the Modern Slavery Act. Prof Islam promoted the importance of the Transform Trade campaign for a Fashion Watchdog and asked people to contact their MP.

The Chairs agreed that details of the Transform Trade campaign would be circulated to attendees along with links to Prof Islam's research.

The meeting closed at 1.55pm