

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

June 30, 2014

Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina
Prime Minister, Bangladesh
c/o Embassy of the Government of Bangladesh
3510 International Drive, NW
Washington, DC 20008

Dear Prime Minister Hasina:

We are writing to you as friends of Bangladesh and as advocates for a strong U.S.-Bangladesh relationship. We are pleased to see the government take some initial steps in response to the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) action plan, and we welcome the increase in the registration of labor unions along with the other changes that have been made to improve working conditions in the garment export industry. While we acknowledge the work that has been done, we note that there are a number of essential steps that must still be taken.

In particular, as union registrations have increased, we have also seen an increase in intimidation and harassment of labor activists. This is of serious concern to the United States Government, including the U.S. Congress.

In our recent engagement with your Commerce Minister and the President of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), we conveyed our concern over this trend and our hope that senior officials of your government, including yourself and the Commerce Minister, would intervene and make clear that this pattern of intimidation and violence would not be tolerated.

The visiting delegation also asked us to share information we received about anti-labor violence and assured us that your government would promptly look into any claims and seek to resolve them. Therefore, you might imagine our shock when we saw several accounts in the press last week reporting that your Commerce Minister and the BGMEA President, rather than calling for the authorities to investigate intimidation, engaged in intimidation of labor activists themselves.¹

As you are likely aware, a key element of the GSP action plan is “to ensure protection of unions and their members from anti-union discrimination and reprisal.” What is especially troubling in

¹ BDNews24, *AL, BNP leaders working against RMG sector: Tofail*, June 22, 2014, <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2014/06/22/al-bnp-leaders-working-against-rmg-sector-tofail>; The Daily Star, *IndustriALL draws ire from Tofail*, June 23, 2104, <http://www.thedailystar.net/business/industriall-draws-ire-from-tofail-29869>; New Age, *BGMEA demands action against trade union for US letter with 'false' info*, June 24, 2014, <http://newagebd.net/23958/bgmea-demands-action-against-trade-union-for-us-letter-with-false-info/#sthash.PJtKb8N2.dpbs>; Financial Express, *Action against rights groups sought for tarnishing image of RMG industry*, June 24, 2014, <http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/2014/06/24/41209>; Dhaka Tribune, *BGMEA boss seeks punishment for spreading falsehood*; June 24, 2014, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/business/2014/jun/24/bgmea-boss-seeks-punishment-spreading-falsehood#sthash.kodXO32k.dpuf>

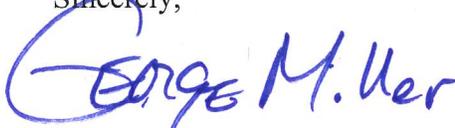
Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina
June 30, 2014
Page 2

this specific case is that the allegations of violence cited by the Minister and BGMEA President were those we passed along to them, per their request.

It is in our shared interests to see your country's garment industry succeed and for Bangladesh to become more prosperous as it advances as a middle-income country. Workers' rights to organize will play an important role in this process. We look to your government to create an environment where workers, factory owners, local police and the ministries will all come together to support Bangladeshi workers' rights to freedom of association—free from discrimination and reprisal. Public statements to the contrary by government and industry officials are not only inappropriate, they send signals that are unhelpful to our common goals.

In this regard, we would welcome your personal assurance that all appropriate government authorities will properly investigate and respond to the serious allegations brought by the National Garment Workers Federation following the attacks in Valuka, as well as any other unresolved allegations of intimidation and violence that have been brought to the attention of the government. We look forward to working with you to resolve issues that will ultimately allow the U.S. to restore GSP benefits and to further Bangladesh's economic development.

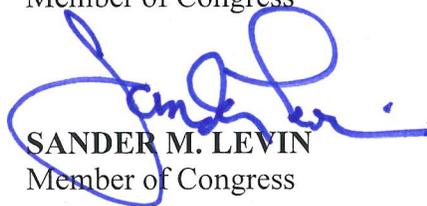
Sincerely,



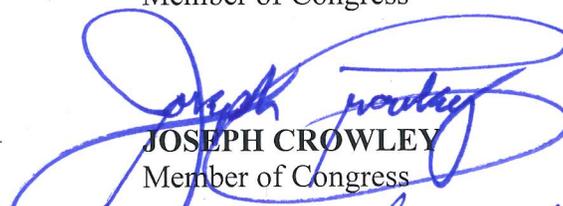
GEORGE MILLER
Member of Congress



ELIOT L. ENGEL
Member of Congress



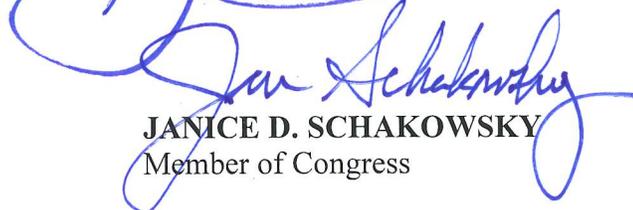
SANDER M. LEVIN
Member of Congress



JOSEPH CROWLEY
Member of Congress



GRACE MENG
Member of Congress



JANICE D. SCHAKOWSKY
Member of Congress

cc: Honorable Tofail Ahmed, Minister of Commerce
Atiqul Islam, President, BGMEA
Honorable Dan Mozena U.S. Ambassador
Honorable Michael Froman, Ambassador, USTR