

NO MORE TOXIC TEXTILE TRADE IN POST-CORONA WORLD



EMILY MACINTOSH APRIL 23, 2020 CIRCULAR
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Pressure is mounting on textile companies to take responsibility for their whole supply chain – as the European Commission begins work on draft new laws that could transform the industry.

“Cancelled orders and delayed payments due to the coronavirus pandemic have left millions of vulnerable workers in the textile supply chain without pay and the livelihoods of their families at risk. This is once again laying bare the lack of clear legal obligations for buyers to take responsibility for their whole supply chain,” said Patrizia Heidegger, Global Policies and Sustainability Director at the European Environmental Bureau.

The EEB is part of a coalition of 65 campaign groups for fair trade, human and workers’ rights, environmental protection, and transparency that today sets out its [own vision](#) for a re-design of the industry’s business model through stricter environmental rules, an end to the culture of unfair purchasing practices and legal obligations on companies to take responsibility for not only their own activities but their whole supply chain.

Heidegger added: *“It’s time for an EU response to tackle both fashion’s exploitation of workers and the shocking environmental and climate damage of an industry based on the sale of ever more new products.”*

Reset the industry

“Voluntary industry action has failed to bring about a fair and sustainable textile industry, so it’s time for EU leaders to reset the industry’s structure,” said Sergi Corbalán, Executive Director of the Fair Trade Advocacy Office – the NGO that brought the broad coalition of campaign groups together.

Corbalán urged policymakers at the European Commission – [currently working on a ‘comprehensive Textile Strategy’](#) – to take heed of the campaign groups’ vision paper as a whole: *“It’s not a menu from*

which the Commission can pick specific initiatives and leave others behind, but a comprehensive strategy in which taking action in each field reinforces the efforts put into others.”

“Little has changed”

It’s been seven years since the 2013 Rana Plaza garment factory collapse in Bangladesh which killed 1134 people and sparked worldwide indignation about exploitation and unsustainable overproduction in the global textile industry.

On Tuesday, Fashion Revolution – the campaign group founded in the wake of the Rana Plaza disaster – published its [annual Transparency Index](#) which ranks 250 of the biggest global fashion brands and retailers on how much they disclose about their social and environmental policies. More than half of the brands reviewed scored 20% or less, showing that there is still a long way to go towards transparency among the world’s largest fashion brands and retailers.

“Little has changed since Rana Plaza,” according to Bangladeshi trade unionist Nazma Akter, General Secretary and Executive Director of the Awaj Foundation. *“Power is not equally distributed; nobody is accountable when a company cancels an order and doesn’t pay. When workers work and don’t get wages what else is it but modern day slavery?”*

Akter added that much of the fashion sold to consumers today is *“killing nature”* with industrial pollution *“being dumped in our countries affecting our food, land, and water”*. She said that it would be the industry’s most vulnerable workers in countries such as Bangladesh – mostly women and girls – who will be *“particularly affected if the sector’s climate impact is not tackled as many of these workers will be among the over 100 million people that will be forced to migrate as a result of climate change by 2050 if no action is taken”*.

In December, new [research](#) from the European Environment Agency highlighted that after food, housing and transport, textiles are the fourth largest cause of [environmental pressure](#). Textiles also cause the second highest pressure on land use and are the fifth largest contributor to carbon emissions from household consumption.

EU action on fashion?

The campaign groups’ vision has been backed by three influential Members of the European Parliament – Delara Burkhardt (S&D), Heidi Hautala (Greens/EFA), and Helmut Scholz (GUE/NGL) – who are calling on more of their colleagues to support better conditions for people and nature.

Environment ministers are [set to discuss](#) the EU textile strategy on 22 June and it is expected that the Commission will publish a roadmap towards the Textile Strategy before the end of 2020.