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LABOUR RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY IN BANGLADESH

The April 2013 tragedy following the collapse of the **Rana Plaza** building in Bangladesh focused international attention on the appalling working conditions and human rights abuses in factories producing clothes and shoes for global brands. The eight-storey building, located on the outskirts of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, housed textile factories employing more than 5,000 workers. The catastrophic collapse of the complex killed more than 1,100 workers and it injured more than 2,000.

After the disaster, major clothing brands launched new initiatives **to protect the safety of workers** in their supply chains. Years later, Bangladesh has seen concrete improvements in building and fire safety, but textile and footwear supply chains remain plagued by serious human rights problems.

Human Rights Watch¹ documented the case of a number of Bangladesh textile industry workers who are forced to work overtime. Many are discriminated because of pregnancy, or they have been denied paid maternity leave. Abuses against trade unions are common. Workers who have tried to organise have been threatened and harassed and many of them have been dismissed in retaliation.

For instance, in the Hazaribagh district of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, approximately 150 tanneries, that produce leather as a raw material for major branded products, expose their workers and local residents **to untreated wastewater** containing chromium, sulphur, ammonia and other chemicals that can cause serious problems.

Government officials, representatives of the tanners' association, trade unionists, and employees of nongovernmental organizations told Human Rights Watch that no tannery in Hazaribagh has a landfill treatment plant to deal with its waste. Tannery workers described and reported a wide range of health problems, including dermatological problems (premature aging, discoloration, itching, skin peeling and rashes, and acid burns), fingers corroded into mere stumps, pain, dizziness, and nausea, and disfigured or amputated limbs. The production of Hazaribagh tanneries accounts for almost 90 percent of total Bangladeshi leather production, most of which is for exporting.

¹ Human Rights in supply chains:

https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/human_rights_in_supply_chains_brochure_lowres_final.pdf



"When I finish my work, I put all these materials aside and I sleep here. I get up in the morning to start working. My family lives in the village and I have a four-year-old son. We, five shoemakers, live together in this room. There are no beds, only our pillows. But this is cheaper than renting a room."

Photo: GMB Akash

Zahidul Islam is 29 years old, and he works preparing shoe soles in Hazaribagh district, Dacca, Bangladesh. See other testimonies in the [Clean Clothes Campaign](#).