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AN END TO THE TRAGEDIES?

An analysis of two unprecedented multi-stakeholder initiatives in
Bangladesh's readymade garment industry.



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Abstract

The safety conditions at many factories in Bangladesh's readymade garment industry are extremely poor. For several years, this has resulted in notorious industrial tragedies, such as the 2012 Tazreen factory fire and the 2013 Rana Plaza building collapse, which together killed more than 1,200 workers and injured many more. Two recently established initiatives; the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety represent an unprecedented collaboration among multinational companies and other stakeholders to collectively address the critical safety and health challenges in the industry.

This thesis investigates the causes of the tragedies at Rana and Tazreen, the extent to which the two initiatives address these causes, and finally approaches the Accord and the Alliance critically from a lens provided by the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The latter in order to analyse if they align with this global standard of practice that is now expected of all States and businesses with regard to business and human rights.

It concludes that while the initiatives do address important root causes, not all of the causes appear to be prioritised equally. Furthermore, both non-alignment and alignment of the two with the Guiding Principles can be identified. The initiatives have merits as well as drawbacks, however, despite a difficult governance context vested with political interests, there are perspectives for constructive interaction. If the two initiatives succeed to coordinate better with each other and with the relevant national institutions, the synergies created have the potential to improve human rights protection.

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