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Pakistan:

Factories more like death trap than workplaces, workers treated more like slave than human beings

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It was darkest and saddest day in history of labour movement in Pakistan when more than 300 workers burnt alive in severest accident of fire in a garment factory in Karachi on Tuesday 11 September.

The fire accident at factory was not the first one in this factory or in other factories, its every day phenomenon but unnoticed till the most heinous crime was occurred and get lime light on electronic and printed media. More than 300 worker lost their precious live at the alter of capitalist greed and lust for more profit.

The society is so criminally brutalized in sense no one heed the voices and cries of downtrodden till the uncountable damage and the un imagine miseries inflict upon them. The same is the case with workers at Ali Enterprises ,a garment factory at Hub river road in SITE industrial area Karachi where couple of time fire broke out in past but no government agency took any stern action.

It is come to know that the factory was established illegally with our registered under factory act. It is an export oriented factory. Here in Pakistan majority of factories are not registered with factory act to avoid the rules and regulations and to deny the rights to workers.

The factory building was not approved PROPERLY from the concern Karachi Building Authority (KBA). The safety measures were seldom observed in any workplace the same was the situation in "Ali Enterprises" Where there was no exit point except one for more than 500 workers at the time of emergency, all the windows were iron grilled and doorways and stairs were stuff with finished or semi finished merchandises.

Generator was used as alternate source of electricity with our properly safety precautions and it was became the main cause of fire eruption along with the boiler blast which perished 300 young male and female worker with in couple of hours and many dead bodies are still in the rubbles. There was no fire fighting or fire extinguishing equipments and mechanism in the factory.

The majority of the workers were on third party contract and none of the worker has appointment letter (that way the identification of dead bodies were not ascertained and now doing it through DNA test), no worker registered with Social Security and Employees Old age Benefit Institute (EOBI) and Worker Welfare Board/Fund. The Workers of the factory were not allowed to formed their union and have collective bargaining rights. The workers who survived the accident told that factory itself insured but workers were not and they also blamed that in past factory owner Shahid Bella himself planned fire to get huge amount in insurance claims.

The National Trade Union Federation Pakistan (NTUF)was the first to react against the accident and organized protest demo in Karachi and demanded to arrest the factory owner, registers criminal cases against concern departmental heads and resignation from labour minister, minister for industries, Governor and Chief Minister of Sindh due to severe negligence on their part.

The NTUF also demanded compensation of PR 1million for the families of died workers and 400,000 for wounded workers and free medical treatment. It also demanded to start the strict labour inspection in coordination with workers representative bodies, register all the factories under Factory Act, observe health and safety laws in true spirit, abolishing of dreaded contract system, issuance of appointment letter to all the workers at the time of employment, registration with social security and old age benefit institutions and workers welfare schemes.

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The NTUF also appeal to international workers bodies to put pressure on international brands and labels to force the local manufacture of strict observance on labour related laws and work place safety standards envisage in ILO conventions and in country laws.

Latest:

*It is reported that 650 workers were in the factory at the time of fire

* basement is filled with very hot water up to 16 feet, it was also informed that at the time of accident there was calls from workers in basement that they were 250 in number so it was feared that more dead bodies are still lying in basement.

* more than 100 were female worker who died in the fire

* There were also indication of death of some child workers

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