

Textile Buyers deliberate on adopting a Voluntary Declaration on Promoting Sustainability in the Textile and Garments Sector in Pakistan

23 June 2015, Lahore - At the third meeting of the Buyers' Forum for the Textile sector, a total of 19 representatives of the international brands reaffirmed their commitment to better labour and environmental practices in the textile sector by discussing the need for adopting a Voluntary Declaration on Promoting Sustainability in Textile Sector through improving productivity and competitiveness.

The participants agreed to support a list of aspirational commitments mainly focusing on creating an enabling environment in the Textile and Garments sector through advocating for and exchanging good practices on labour, environmental and social compliance.

The Buyers' Forum gathers the largest international brands that source from Pakistan – including H&M, Li& Fung, V&D, Gap India and C&A amongst others. These brands will work together to promote better compliance with standards in order to allow Pakistan's textile sector to remain competitive and attractive internationally. The meeting was facilitated by the Netherlands Government, International Finance Corporation and the International Labour Organisation.

The participants also discussed the findings of the mapping assessment on the status of compliance and existing good practices in textile sector undertaken by the Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH), a Dutch NGO. According to the study, smaller local manufacturers across the textile value chain do not have compliance monitoring mechanisms and the capacity to maximise potential benefit of GSP+. Ineffective labour inspection and absence of building safety and fire codes are particular challenges to the adherence of labour standards including Occupational Safety and Health.

While deliberating on the recommendations of the study, the participants agreed on the need to foster support for three key areas; strengthening labour inspection regime, issues of contractual employment and supporting smaller manufacturers to improve compliance at par with International Standards.

A working committee of the buyers will come together to discuss the priority areas and draw an action plan that will be shared at the next meeting planned in October.

The acting ambassador' of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Mr. Karel Hartogh appreciated the commitment demonstrated by the buyers: "It is the participants that are the driving force behind the forum. Their ownership can ensure opportunities for the textile sector in Pakistan to grow and improve productivity and

competitiveness.” Announcing a new and ambitious initiative to reinvigorate the labour inspection system in Pakistan, he said that the Dutch Government together with the ILO aims to strengthen the labour inspection regime by training labour inspectors and institutionalising mechanisms that will contribute to an effective and facilitative business environment and welfare of the workers. “This is especially pertinent now that Pakistan’s GSP+ has greatly increased textile exports to the EU. European buyers are keen on compliance with international and national labour standards, which is also a crucial condition to maintain GSP+ status.”

The ILO Country Director, Mr. Francesco d’ Ovidio said that it is important for the buyers to consider supporting local SME’s across the textile value chain, particularly those at the tail end to strengthen their capacity to comply with international labour and environmental standards which would in turn facilitate decent working conditions in the sector. The overall objective of this support system would be to increase productivity and ultimately competitiveness of textile goods produced in Pakistan in the multilateral trade system. Mr. d’Ovidio shared that the ILO had conducted a regional research that will provide policy and legal recommendations for improving the minimum wage setting, implementation and working conditions in textiles sector.