

Enterprise Improvement and Regulation in Textiles High on Buyers' Forum Agenda in Pakistan

30 October 2015, Islamabad - At the fourth meeting of the Buyers' Forum in Islamabad held on 29th October 2015, the 24 participating international textile buyers agreed on a joint roadmap and specific working groups for the workings of their Forum.

A working group will be constituted for each of the three priorities for the buyers. These priorities are: (1) improving practices at textile producers not yet compliant with international labour and environmental standards; (2) joint advocacy for better policy, laws and regulations governing textile production; and (3) communications for more effective coordination and cooperation.

The meeting also included a briefing to Government, Diplomatic and Development Partners in Pakistan on the status and progress of the Forum since its establishment in 2014.

The Buyers' Forum was set up in 2014 with the aim of jointly helping to make Pakistan's textile industry more sustainable and attractive to international buyers. A strong consensus has been built amongst the members on the importance of compliance with environmental, labour and health and safety standards. This compliance is critical not only for enhanced business productivity and sustainability, but also for Pakistan to maintain the preferential trade conditions under its current GSP+ status.

Highlighting the progress the forum has made since last December, the Co-Convenor of the Buyers Forum shared that expanding from 17 to 24 brands with national presence and international outreach is a tremendous achievement. Cumulatively these brands & retailers make up for about 50% of Pakistan's apparel and home-textiles exports. The Co-Convenor also stated that each of the brands bring their expertise in areas like advocacy and outreach, knowledge creation and supplier engagement programmes that will complement the future course of action for the Forum in Pakistan. The need to cultivate regional and global synergies with similar forums for exchange of best practices and learning was also highlighted.

Stressing on the importance of the Forum and its objectives, Ms. Sherin Khan, Office in-Charge of the International Labour Organization (ILO), said that in order to meet these requirements, an integrated approach for compliance to international standards in the textile sector involving government, workers' and employers' organisations as well as international buyers is of critical importance.

Ms. Jeannette Seppen, Ambassador-Designate of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (which is one of the three co-conveners of the Forum), welcomed the new members of the Forum: “I am glad that so many textile buyers are keen to do business in a responsible way here in Pakistan, and I commend you on the rapid progress you have made in formulating a joint strategy towards that goal.” IDH, a Dutch NGO specialised in global value chains, will assist the Buyers’ Forum in formulating precise joint activities within the common strategy.

Representing International Finance Corporation (IFC), Ms. Shabana Khawar, Principal Country Officer, mentioned that IFC was extremely pleased by the engagement of all partners in particular the Brand representatives who are creating momentum among other Brands to join and agree on a sustainable strategy and roadmap for the development of the sector. We, along with the other convening partners, stand ready to support them to identify areas of expertise where we can contribute.”

Buyers showed commitment to expand their sourcing from Pakistan if Pakistani factories improve their compliance levels.

The deliberations concluded with a briefing on the status and commitments of the forum to the relevant Government Ministries of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, Commerce and Textile Industries and partners from donor agencies and diplomatic missions. The Government also updated the forum on the progress made on various policy and programme initiatives to improve productivity and competitiveness in the industry and re-affirmed its commitment to effective compliance and reporting on labour, social and environmental standards.