

# JOINT STATEMENT ON BETTER WORK TRANSPARENCY DATA

We, the undersigned unions and NGOs, are writing to request changes regarding the Better Work Transparency Portal, an initiative of the International Labour Organization and the International Finance Corporation, to make it more useful to workers and unions. This statement is addressed to Better Work and its Advisory Committee.

Better Work conducts assessments of factories on their compliance in relation to a number of international and national labour standards, publishing these findings on your transparency portal database. We are heartened by the recent steps Better Work is taking to include workers' voices in the re-design of the portal. We would like to take this opportunity to highlight certain issues we hope Better Work will take into serious consideration during this revamp.

Increasing transparency is integral to addressing rampant rights abuses in the garment sector, and public data can hold companies accountable for violations. But the data must be useful for workers, in that they should be able to use the data for evidence based collective bargaining to drive for improvements in working conditions at the factory level. The transparency portal has so far been more of a justificatory tool for companies to uphold their own corporate responsibility standards by demonstrating they are sourcing from factories that are verified as compliant by Better Work. Based on the user experiences of 110,000 workers and unions in Cambodia, Indonesia and Bangladesh, Better Work's publicly available data on factory working conditions remain problematic in four important ways.

**FIRST, THE INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION OF WORKERS AND UNIONS IN THE CREATION OF BETTER WORK DATA HAS NOT BEEN ADEQUATELY ENSURED.** The findings of the audit are not shared back to workers in a way that is meaningful or accessible to most workers. For example, in Indonesia, the audit findings are shared in bipartite committee meetings, but these often do not include independent trade union officials or members. Workers are also not given a detailed report of all the findings, but only the overview of a handful of issues from the assessment. In Cambodia, factory-level Performance Improvement Consultative Committees are used to share assessment results back with workers. However, feedback from workers who have attended these meetings indicate that they are unable to engage fully as they do not have the training nor time to understand what is in the reports and what it means for workers.

**Change needed:** We request that Better Work engage a wide spectrum of worker representatives in the data sharing back and validation process, including independent unions, and that the full audit findings in local language are shared with trade unions and posted inside in the factory. Moreover, workers should be given adequate training and ensured a safe environment where they can provide feedback on the data without fearing retribution.

**SECOND, THE DATA PUBLISHED ON THE ONLINE PORTALS FAILS TO SUFFICIENTLY CAPTURE ALL THE ISSUES THAT WORKERS WOULD LIKE ADDRESSED.** Not all the compliance points that are assessed by Better Work are publicly available, leading to gaps in obtaining a comprehensive overview of factory-level working conditions. Comprehensive data is essential to providing workers with more information during evidence-based bargaining, and to ensure that they can target more issues. Moreover, having comprehensive data on all the factories available on the portal would be useful for unions if they wish to have a comparative view of conditions in factories where they represent workers. Access to comprehensive data would also be useful for sectoral level bargaining and negotiations.

**Change needed:** Therefore, we request that more detailed factory compliance data be published on the transparency portals. In the context of Better Factories Cambodia, the Transparency Portal should also disclose compliance data on all 52 issues which are disclosed publicly for the low compliance factories, instead of just the 21 critical issues alone. In the case of Better Work Indonesia, we request that all issues assessed be published on the portal in the local language, in addition to English. Specific details of non-compliance should also be published on the portals, for example, if a factory is in violation of overtime wages requirement, what was the exact nature of violation, how many workers were affected, etc. For all countries, information on whether the factory has a collective bargaining agreement in place should be published.

**THIRD, THE DATA ITSELF IS SOMETIMES INACCURATE AND DOES NOT REPRESENT THE EXPERIENCE OF WORKERS IN THE FACTORIES.** While factories are given the opportunity to refute the findings or note changes made on the transparency portal, there is no similar mechanism for unions to dispute the data that is published on their factories.

**Change needed:** We request Better Work to ensure that feedback from the trade unions on the findings is also invited and published on the portals.

**FOURTH, WORKERS' ACCESSIBILITY TO THE DATABASE IS COMPROMISED BY THE FACT THAT IT DOES NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE LITERACY AND TECHNOLOGICAL BARRIERS WORKERS FACE.** Key information on the Transparency Portal for Indonesia is only available in English. In Cambodia, workers have differing levels of literacy, even in their native language. As such, many are unable to properly interpret the data.

**Change needed:** In the redesign of the portals, Better Work should consider establishing other platforms or utilizing other methods so that the data is presented in a manner that workers can easily access and understand, such as through a mobile app, or integration with social media platforms. Whatever the means or channel, the important thing would be to reduce the number of steps involved in order to access the data. Representing the data in a more visual, digestible format would make it more engaging and comprehensible for workers.

We call on Better Work to actively consider the concerns we have outlined in this statement, to build data democracy and improve the quality the data it publishes. We understand that Better Work has been made aware of these issues and is in the process of improving accessibility to the data with workers' input. But more must be done. We hope that Better Work can engage more with and include workers in the creation of meaningful data. The database should be by and for workers as well as employers and buyers. Without worker input and engagement, the portals continue to be tools for top-down compliance, and do little to target widespread rights abuses, which are still found in garment factories. We urge Better Work to ensure that programmes across all countries follow a more workers-centred approach, e.g., by applying worker-driven monitoring methods. Finally, we request the Advisory Committee of the Better Work Programme to ensure that our concerns are heard and taken into account by Better Work and its country-programmes.

**THIS STATEMENT IS ENDORSED BY THE FOLLOWING TRADE UNIONS**

**INDONESIA:**



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**CAMBODIA:**



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**Ry Sithyneth**

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**Touch Soeur**

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## EUROPE:



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President, CNV Internationaal - Netherlands

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## ENDORSED BY THE FOLLOWING TUSSOS:



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