



To: Prime Minister, Boris Johnson
 Priti Patel, Secretary of State for the Home Department
 Alok Sharma, Secretary of State for Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy

cc: Peter Soulsby, Mayor of Leicester City Council

15th July 2020

Ref: Urgent Action Needed for Leicester Garment Workers and Recommendations for Terms of Reference of the Leicester Garment Cross Government Task Force

The past decade has seen numerous reports detailing abusive working conditions in Leicester garment factories, and other factories both in the UK and internationally. The situation was also investigated during the 2019 Environmental Audit Committee investigation into Fast Fashion and most recently, concerns were raised in Parliament in January 2020 (see Annex 1: Evidence). The recent report by Labour Behind the Label into alleged abuses within the garment industry in Leicester has since led to a series of further exposés, including furlough fraud, modern slavery, abusive working conditions, breaches of Covid-19 guidelines, as well as widespread wage theft and the exploitation of vulnerable workers.

We welcome this Government's steps to address the working conditions of the UK's most vulnerable workers including the Modern Slavery Act, the Taylor review on modern working practices, and the creation of a single enforcement Body. It is clear; however, that much more effective and pro-active action needs to be taken. Action is needed both to ensure all workers in the Leicester garment industry are protected by labour and health and safety laws and in curbing the abusive, potentially illegal purchasing practices by clothing retailers and brands which have contributed to this situation.

While we welcome the announcement of the establishment of a cross government task force to investigate 'on the ground' in Leicester, it is crucial that the underlying drivers of abuse are identified so long-term solutions can be developed.



We, the undersigned, ask the Government to take the following urgent steps:

1. Protect all workers in the Leicester garment industry and ensure that remedy, including payment of unpaid wages and so on, is provided to those who have been the victims of non-payment or underpayment of wages and benefits (wage theft), furlough fraud, unsafe environments, and modern slavery.
2. Ensure that the cross government task force investigates the situation of workers in factories in Leicester and examines the underlying causes. We recommend that the terms of reference for the task force includes the following questions:
 - a. What are the drivers perpetuating the illegal working conditions in the garment industry in Leicester and other cities with garment manufacturing in the UK?
 - b. What challenges have held the government back from taking effective action when the issues have been discussed in the public domain for many years?
 - c. What are the solutions, including legislation, and what are the coordinated roles needed by all relevant authorities – including those regarding enforcement, remediation, and oversight?

Such an investigation by the task force must include consultation with local and national stakeholders (including workers, community groups, unions) to ensure that their expertise and experiences are heard and can shape solutions.

The task force should report to Parliament with an interim report and a final report.

We look forward to working with you to address these very serious challenges to a thriving, creative sustainable and successful fashion manufacture sector in the UK, which we all want to see.

Yours sincerely,

Dominique Muller, Policy Director, Labour Behind the Label

Jasmine O'Connor OBE, CEO, Anti-Slavery International

Thulsi Narayanasamy, Senior Labour Rights Researcher, Business & Human Rights Resource Centre

Mark Dearn, Director, CORE Coalition

Meena Varma, Director, Dalit Solidarity Network UK

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cont'd...

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Labour Behind the Label is an NGO which supports garment workers worldwide in defending their rights.

Labour Behind the Label is a workers' co-operative and not-for-profit company registered in England, no. 04173634

The Labour Behind the Label Trust is a charity for tax purposes, HMRC ref. EW0230



Joanna Ewart-James, Executive Director, Freedom United

Dorothy Grace Guerrero, Head of Policy and Advocacy, Global Justice Now

Minnie Rahman, Public Affairs and Campaigns Manager, Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants

Rachel Wilshaw, Ethical Trade Manager, Oxfam GB

Martin Buttle, Head of Good Work, ShareAction

Remi Edwards, Researcher, Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute, The University of Sheffield

Fiona Gooch, Senior Policy Advisor, Traidcraft Exchange

Lee Barron, Regional Secretary, Trades Union Congress Midlands

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Annex: Evidence

1. 2015, University of Leicester: "A New Industry on a Skewed Playing Field: Supply Chain Relations and Working Conditions in UK Garment Manufacturing, with a case study on Leicester." <https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/press/for-journalists/media-resources/Leicester%20Report%20-%20Final%20-to%20publish.pdf>
2. Hammer, Nik et al (2015) A New Industry on a Skewed Playing Field: Supply Chain Relations and Working Conditions in UK Garment Manufacturing. London: Ethical Trading Initiative. Available at: <https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/press/press-releases/2015/february/new-report-published-on-working-conditions-in-leiceser-garment-sector>.
3. 2017, C4: "Leicester sweatshops exposed" <https://www.channel4.com/press/news/undercover-britains-cheap-clothes-channel-4-dispatches>
4. 2017, QZ.com: "To "compete with China and Bangladesh," UK garment factories paid workers as little as £3 per hour" <https://qz.com/893448/uk-garment-workers-paid-as-little-as-3-an-hour-in-violation-of-labor-law/>
5. 2018, FT: " "Dark Factories: Labour Exploitation in UK garment industry" <https://www.ft.com/content/e427327e-5892-11e8-b8b2-d6ceb45fa9d0>
6. O'Connor, Sarah (2018) 'Dark factories: labour exploitation in Britain's garment industry'. Financial Times Magazine, 17 May 2018. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/e427327e-5892-11e8-b8b2-d6ceb45fa9d0>.
7. 2019, BBC: "Leicester: A city fighting fast-fashion sweatshops" <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-48226187>
8. Jan 2020, Guardian: "Alarm over UK fast fashion factories" <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jan/23/national-shame-mp-sounds-alarm-over-uk-fast-fashion-factories>
9. Jun 2020, Hancock: "Clearly some problems have been under the radar in Leicester" https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-53297782?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers&link_location=live-reporting-story

Other UK towns where workers are at risk of exploitation:

10. Brill, L. (2019) 'The Greater Manchester textile and garment industry: a scoping study.' Leeds: Homeworkers Worldwide. www.homeworkersww.org.uk/assets/uploads/files/HWW-GM-textiles-manufacturing-FINAL.pdf
11. Froud, Julie, Hayes, Steven, Wei, Hua & Williams, Karel (2016). Coming Back. Resilience and precarity in UK textiles and apparel. University of Manchester. <https://foundationaleconomycom.files.wordpress.com/2017/02/coming-back-capability-and-precariety-in-uk-textiles-and-apparel-march-2017.pdf>
12. Manchester Growth Company (2017) 'Realising the growth potential of UK Fashion and Textile Manufacturing: a report for The Alliance Project and N Brown.' National Textiles Growth Programme. Available at: <http://www.ltma.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/The-Final-Alliance-Project-Report-Oct-2012-to-May-2017.pdf>

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