

## **Asia Floor Wage Campaign – Bengaluru Programme 7<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> Oct 09**

8 organisations are part of the Asia Floor Wage Alliance Bengaluru namely –Garment Workers and Staff Association, Garment and Textile Workers Union, Garment Workers Union, Garment Workers Union-Karnataka, Karnataka Garment Workers Union, Munnade, CIVIDEP and FEDINA.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> October 2009, a press conference was held at the press club, Bengaluru at 11 am which was attended by 20 media personnel. Some of the regional electronic media carried the news and print media as well.

The Press conference was addressed by one worker Com. Sumathi, who spoke about severe working conditions in her factory and the violations of labour laws and theft of Provident Fund(PF) and Employees State Insurance(ESI) contributions.

Com. Sebastian Devaraj, President, KGWU, spoke about the AFW, its significance and relevance in unifying workers across Asia to strengthen their collective bargaining power, the responsibility of the respective Governments to protect its work force and Domestic industry and the role of Domestic industry in supporting an effort to demand for a fairer share of the profits to increase the wages to a minimum decent level.

Com. Prathibha, Coordinator, CIVIDEP, explained the basis on which a minimum living wage was being demanded. She spoke about the empirical study conducted in 2007 and the subsequent rise in prices. She emphasised the need for fixing a basic wage of around Rs. 7000/- plus DA which would enable garment workers in Bengaluru to get close to Rs.10,000/- a month which is a requirement for a minimum decent living standard, under the present inflationary conditions.

Com. Sowbhagya, spoke about the production pressures, low wages and the sexual harassment at the work place.

Com. Balakrishna, Convenor, GW & SA, spoke about the Global capitalist crisis, price rise, production pressure and sexual harassment at work place among other things and appealed to the media personal to give wide coverage to help the workers achieve better standards of living.

The significance of 7<sup>th</sup> October as the 'International Day for Decent Work' was emphasised.

A public event was organised on the 11<sup>th</sup> October as workers can participate in larger numbers on Sunday.

One week prior to this event posters were pasted in all areas where Garment industries are located (1500 posters – in Mysore Rd, Ullalu, Peenya Lingarajapuram, Hosur Road, Thavarekere, Bammanahalli, Kolar and Tumkur). Posters were also put up in areas of residences of garment workers. About 10,000 pamphlets were widely distributed in all these areas.

Signature campaign has been initiated among workers in support of the campaign.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> October, a rally of around 250 garment workers was taken out from Bannappa Park near Hudson Circle to the Venue of the meeting in KGS Club Hall, Cubbon Park. The participation was much lesser than expected, as many employers deliberately imposed overtime work on Sunday (this after seeing the wall posters of the event). The other reason being to compensate for the holiday being given for Deepavali on 19<sup>th</sup> October they were made to work on this Sunday.

Banners of AFW Alliance and respective banners of participating Unions and Placards highlighting the issues were carried in the rally. 3000 pamphlets were distributed along the route of the Rally. There were continuous slogan shouting to draw the attention of the public as well as to educate the participating workers.

The meeting commenced at 12.15pm. Welcome song was sung by the Munnade group and Navachethana group.

Com. M.C. Narasimhan, AITUC State President, Karnataka, who had agreed to attend the program and address the workers was unable to do so, as he was suffering from severe back ache. He sent word that he will always be available for any support needed and wished the program and the campaign well.

Com. Shivaraj, Advocate, KGWU welcomed the gathering,

Com. Sebastian Devaraj, President, KGWU, spoke on AFW and its significance in unifying the workers across Asia, increasing the collective bargaining capacity and raising the wages of Garment workers across Asia. He emphasised that the industry had the capacity to pay much higher wages, and it was only a question of equitable distribution of profits.

He urged the workers to start asking questions about their miserable conditions of work, not to accept violations, aggressions and deprivation meekly. If they cannot question it individually, then they must come together to gain strength, form/join unions, place proper demands and bargain collectively, for it was a question of life and death. He briefed the workers about the launch programme in Delhi and the significance of 7<sup>th</sup> Oct – International Day for decent work.

Com. VJK Nair, CITU State Secretary, addressed the workers specially focusing on the issue of decent living wages. He explained in minute detail, on what basis the minimum wage is demanded in terms of calories of food intake and other essentials. He said there is a need to achieve a common minimum living wage across the industries. That the various categories are unnecessary and unscientific. It is made with the idea of keeping the workers divided. The Minimum Wage is calculated on the basis of what is required to keep the body and soul together and is the barest minimum. Therefore, it cannot vary from one human being to another human being in different categories of industries. 8 states in India already have it.

At the end he gave a call for a united struggle of all the workers irrespective of what flag or banner they are under. Only a united struggle of the working class as a whole can achieve better standards of living for the workers.

Dr. Girija Kongi, Administrator, Medical Science, ESIC, spoke about the various labour laws and the need for the workers to access this. She urged the workers to lodge complaints whenever there are violations. This would help reform the system and help better delivery of services.

Com. Suma, General Secretary, KGWU and Com. Thimmanna, Executive committee member, KGWU who returned from Delhi the same day after having attended the AFW campaign International launch, shared their experiences of the event. Com. Suma said that they learnt from exchanges with workers that the wages in Delhi were also very low and the labour laws were not at all implemented.

Com. Thimmanna said the experience of attending the launch programme in Delhi and meeting other workers has made him more determined to organise strongly and bring in more workers to join the Union. He said there is a need for all workers in the garment industry to come together and fight the exploitation and improve the standard of living of the workers.

Com. Balakrishna, Convenor, GW & SA, addressed the workers and urged them to unite, wage stronger struggles and join the larger struggle of the Working class. He said more trainings can be conducted to raise the consciousness among the workers.

Com. Mallikarjuna, Organising Secretary, GW&SA, made the valedictory speech. He called upon workers who attended to spread the word to other workers. He thanked every one but felt that for a city with 3 lakh workers many more should have attended. He urged them to make the next event a much larger gathering to make ourselves heard more effectively.

Concluded at 2.30pm.

Sebastian Devraj, Convenor  
AFW Alliance, Bengaluru Chapter