



## PRESS RELEASE

All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) issued the following Press Release

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### **PAKISTAN'S FIRM COMMITMENT TO PROTECT WORKERS' RIGHTS Amidst Economic Turmoil, Textile and Garment Workers' Dignity and Safety is a Top Priority**

*ISLAMABAD, 27<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2023* – The All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) strongly rejects the baseless allegations by Labour Behind the Label and the National Trade Union Federation (NTUF) in their report titled Hanging on by a Thread.

The report published in September 2023 and circulated widely, including to multilateral organizations, Pakistan's bilateral partners, as well as leading international apparel companies has falsely accused Pakistan's textile and garment sectors of non-compliance with key labor rights legislation and international standards. Its authors, supported by a commercial actor with vested interests, have portrayed a biased picture of the current compliance landscape in the textile industry and blackmailed individual firms. They have further circulated factually incorrect and maliciously manipulated analyses to international apparel firms that are sourcing from Pakistan, as well as to key EU labor organizations in order to further their own interests that are in stark contrast to the interests of the textile sector as well as those of the country and economy at large.

These malicious actions not only threaten the industry's strong international reputation, but also its international market access (including Pakistan's GSP plus status with the EU) and long-standing relationships with international clients. Such threats to the industry's operations and the livelihoods of its employees must not be overlooked by the national authorities. There is also a considerable need for the global community of buyers including brands to avoid falling prey to ungrounded allegations against the manufacturers and assess their compliance based on valid, fair, and certain evidence.

The report highlights the impact of Pakistan's ongoing economic crisis on textile sector workers. Pakistan is currently experiencing economic turmoil with poverty rate risen to 37% in 2023. This upheaval has hit the textile and garment industry workers the most. However, APTMA, with the support of all its members, has been at the forefront of advocating for the livelihoods of textile sector workers. Since early 2022, the textile sector has been faced with challenges such as exorbitant energy costs and rampant inflation leading to a full-blown crisis in the industry. Textile exports declined from an all-time high of \$19.3 billion to \$16.5 billion in FY23, and we are expecting a further decline to \$14.8 billion if current conditions prevail. It is always the workers who bear the brunt of such crises, and we continue to advocate for their interests by demanding reform in key economic policies so that factories can get running again and workers can start earning again.

The textile industry stringently complies with all minimum wage standards as mandated by the government's recent notification on minimum rates of wages. Child labor is strictly prohibited and well monitored, and providing a safe and dignified working environment to all industry workers is a top priority. Collective bargaining and freedom of association are encouraged at all levels. Compliance on these issues is in fact mandatory for all Pakistani exporters in order for them to sell their products in the international market. It is further evidenced by a range of certifications, such as WRAP, BSCI, and Fair Trade, approved by international certification bodies to the companies based on valid and credible reporting and auditing mechanisms.

Moreover, all APTMA members are fully compliant with all international and national requirements on labor rights given the rising demand for compliance with regulations from global buyers, as well as due to increasing awareness and education in the industries to protect labor rights.

Our members promote an inclusive workforce and women's safety through reconnect programs, dedicated technical training schools, and increasing women's mobility through, for instance, initiatives such as the Women on Wheels program by Interloop Limited.

Furthermore, our members are committed to strongly ensuring that every worker has the right to choose or associate/affiliate with any association, committee or union concerning the resolution of problems faced in the workplace. Worker Management Councils are established to hold fair elections for workers' representatives, regular trainings on workers' rights are delivered and regular benefits such as life insurance, health care, disability & invalidity coverage, retirement benefits, and paid maternity leave are ensured.

Risk assessments are carried out proactively to mitigate any health and safety risks to the workers and grievances are effectively communicated. Adequate health and safety is ensured through customer/brand specified codes and conduct documents, ISO-14001:2015 and ISO-45001:2018 standards compliant EHS management systems, emergency management systems, fire emergency response mechanisms and forums of EHS committees to vigorously assess hazards and risks.

Thus, invoking broad generalizations and associating an overwhelming majority of fully compliant firms with the condemnable practices of the few firms violating industry-wide standards not only overshadows important progress and achievements with regard to improving sustainability, health and safety, unionization and freedom of association, provision of an overall working environment in compliance with domestic and international standards, but also unfairly threatens and jeopardizes further progress on these goals by damaging the industry and country's hard-earned international repute.

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*Forwarded for favor of publication in your esteemed newspaper / transmission.*

**SHAHID SATTAR**

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