

Bangladesh

Working with Rana Plaza survivors

© Bayazidakter | Dreamstime.com - Rana Plaza Collapsed Photo



Unifor
Social
Justice
Fund

www.unifor.org/sjf



Bangladesh is one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world. Nearly half the country's population lives under the international poverty line of \$1.25 a day. Of Bangladesh's 150.5 million residents, 22.5 million people have a disability and are often excluded from employment opportunities and development initiatives.

THE Rana Plaza COLLAPSE

1,129

garment workers killed

2,438

survivors found alive

499

survivors left disabled

HUNDREDS

of people unaccounted for

In Bangladesh, factory fires and industrial accidents have become frighteningly common as the country has grown into one of the largest garment exporters in the world.

This rise has come at the expense of workers' wages, working conditions and the most basic of health and safety considerations. Labour standards and laws are not enforced and union organizers and workers advocating for better conditions face harassment and violence and lack protection from the state.

On April 29, 2013, the eight-storey Rana Plaza factory building in Savar, Bangladesh collapsed during the workday, with thousands of garment workers trapped inside.

Workers had previously raised concerns about the safety of the building, only to be threatened with dismissal. The collapse killed 1,129 people, with 2,438 people rescued alive and hundreds more unaccounted for. The majority of the victims were women, with 75 per cent under 28 years old. The collapse left hundreds of survivors with severe injuries – amputation, paralysis and mobility issues.

The **Unifor Social Justice Fund** has partnered with disability rights and development organization Handicap International to work to help those most affected get the rehabilitation support they need, as well as specialized medical services and devices.

Of the 499 survivors with disabilities, 109 moved back to their rural hometown, putting them out of reach of most rehabilitation and livelihood support centres.



Handicap International works alongside people with disabilities and vulnerable populations, responding to their essential needs, improving their living conditions by making necessary changes, while promoting respect for their dignity and fundamental human rights. Handicap International also works to build up local disability networks and organizations to ensure that services and support are sustained.

As part of the post-Rana Plaza disaster efforts, Handicap International first worked to locate Rana Plaza survivors and then to assess both their needs and mapping resources in the region.

Once the needs were understood, Handicap International sought out physical rehabilitation and fitted survivors with any necessary assistive devices to increase mobility, independence and their ability to carry out the activities of daily life.

Recognizing that many did not want to return to garment work, a number of participants needed employment retraining and access other livelihood opportunities. Handicap International worked to help develop the capacity of local disabled peoples' organizations so they could support people in finding new sources of income.

Key to the success of the program is the component of advocacy, conducted alongside and on behalf of people with disabilities. Handicap International worked with local organizations to develop evidence-based advocacy campaigns directed at employers and the private sector on disability prevention practices and creating more inclusive workplaces and spaces. There was also a public awareness campaign on disability prevention and inclusion in work environments.

By building up local networks and advocating on behalf of people with disabilities, Handicap International, with support from the SJF, is able ensure that workers living with permanent disabilities live in dignity, with respect for their rights and a means to earn a living. The SJF has a deep commitment to working to ensure workers in other countries can exercise their rights and live in safety and dignity.



LOCATE

Found survivors and assessed their needs



AID

Provided survivors with physical rehabilitation and assistive mobility devices



SUPPORT

Employment retraining and access to other livelihood opportunities



ADVOCATE

For disability awareness and inclusive workplaces