

## FACT SHEET ON THE STERN CENTER'S RESPONSE TO CRITICISMS OF RESEARCH ON WORKER SAFETY IN THE BANGLADESH GARMENT INDUSTRY

The authors of the Stern Center's December 2015 Report on worker safety in Bangladesh have posted a letter of reply to scholars who asked them to respond to criticisms of their Report, which were enumerated in a recent study released by the Center for Global Workers Rights (CGWR) at Penn State. This memo outlines why the response provided by the Stern researchers is inadequate and misleading.

- The CGWR critique identified erroneous employment entries for four factories in the factory database compiled by Stern. Rather than acknowledge this mistake, Stern's letter notes only that their critics identified "potential errors in employment data entry in four factories out of 7,100." While Stern is correct that these four factories represent a small share of the 7,100 in the database, they make up an enormous share of the 'missing' workers Stern claims to have found: *this error added 335,000 workers to Stern's employment total, or more than 1/3 of the difference between Stern's estimated employment total of 5.1 million and the prevailing estimate of 4 million garment workers provided by Bangladeshi sources.*
- The CGWR critique pointed out that the Accord and Alliance misclassified Accord and Alliance supplier factories, which caused them to understate the extent of coverage provided by these factory safety programs. Rather than acknowledge this mistake, Stern claims that the "Accord and Alliance factory lists in our analysis (October/November 2014) included 1,852 factories. As of February 2016, they included 1,856 factories. Our analysis is consistent with the Accord and Alliance's own reporting." This claim is true, but irrelevant: While the Accord and Alliance lists included about 1,856 factories in November of 2014, Stern only designated 1,532 of these factories in their database membership columns as Accord and/or Alliance members. *This error resulted in an undercounting of approximately 450,000 workers covered by the Accord and Alliance.*
- The CGWR critique questioned Stern's decision to use outdated trade association membership lists as a data source when compiling its factory database. Stern conceded this point: "[w]e did not edit the data that we scraped from the five source lists, but did combine records in the process of de-duplication. As we created the comprehensive dataset, we made a judgment that we would not seek to correct even obvious errors in data entry (such as the inclusion of the factories in Rana Plaza). Recognizing the limits of our own knowledge and capacity to verify each of the 7,100 entries, we decided to present the data as-is." This response fails to explain why, if Stern was aware of these limitations, it decided to use this data as the sole basis for a set of sweeping and widely disseminated empirical claims about the number of registered factories in Bangladesh, the number of workers they employ, and the extent of worker coverage provided by the Accord and Alliance.

In short, Stern's response does not suggest that the criticisms levied in the CGWR study are incorrect, but neither does it offer a correction or retraction of its earlier claims about the size of the formal garment sector in Bangladesh and the extent of the coverage provided by the existing factory safety programs. If we are wrong, Stern should explain why. If we are right, Stern should acknowledge its error.