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Joint Statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht following the recent building collapse in Bangladesh

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Commissioner for Trade Karel de Gucht made today the following statement:

“It is almost one week since the collapse of an illegally-constructed building containing garment factories in Savar, just outside Dhaka in Bangladesh, on Wednesday 24 April 2013. The sheer scale of this disaster and the alleged criminality around the building’s construction is finally becoming clear to the world. We are both deeply saddened by the terrible loss of life. This tragedy is all the more shocking as it follows textile factory fires in Bangladesh in recent months which have killed more than a hundred workers.

As Bangladesh’s largest trade partner, the European Union is very concerned about the labour conditions, including health and safety provisions, established for workers in factories across the country. In light of all these events, the European Union calls upon the Bangladeshi authorities to act immediately to ensure that factories across the country comply with international labour standards including International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions. The EU is presently considering appropriate action, including through the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) – through which Bangladesh currently receives duty-free and quota-free access to the EU market under the ‘Everything But Arms’ scheme – in order to incentivise responsible management of supply chains involving developing countries.

The EU is willing and ready to assist the Bangladeshi authorities in any way it can to meet the required international standards. At the same time, we continue to encourage European and international companies to promote better health and safety standards in garment factories in Bangladesh in line with internationally recognised Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) guidelines.”

P R E S S

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