

BRITAIN AND

BANGLADESH

Policy Recommendations



LCHR
Labour Campaign for Human Rights

Britain and Bangladesh: Policy Recommendations

The Labour Campaign for Human Rights

Economic Relationship: Trade

1. The UK should ensure workers' rights are a priority in its trade arrangements with Bangladesh. It must support unions, NGOs and grassroots organisations in Bangladesh that are seeking to improve labour conditions. It should put pressure on global corporations to perform due diligence checks across their supply chains. It should encourage the Bangladesh government to strengthen trade union legislation. It should ensure that if and when the Accord and Alliance on fire and building safety inspections ends, the new government-established inspection system operates independently and credibly.
2. The UK should take steps to educate Britain's consumers about the human cost of 'fast fashion' to encourage a fashion economy where people are willing to pay more for fewer items. It should provide clear economic incentives for retailers to move away from the cycle of reducing costs and maximising profits, and create a trading standard (similar to 'fair trade' or 'free range') to signal that workers' rights have been respected in an item's production process. This would help ensure that another Rana Plaza disaster never happens again.
3. The UK should support economic diversification in Bangladesh, by supporting sectors such as agro-processing, ship building (as well as breaking), and information & communication technology (ICT). The garment sector is currently Bangladesh's main driver of growth, so the UK's post-Brexit trade agreements with Bangladesh should be reviewed to ensure that it encourages inclusive economic growth in other sectors of the economy. It should help Bangladesh invest in renewable technologies to diversify away from a reliance on fossil fuels.
4. The UK should ensure that there are human rights guarantees in any post-Brexit trade deal with Bangladesh.

Economic Relationship: Aid

5. The UK should ensure that its aid promotes the rule of law in Bangladesh. Access to justice in Bangladesh must be for all, not just the rich. The UK should review its development spending in Bangladesh to ensure that it is fulfilling Sustainable Development Goal 16, and that it is providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

6. The UK should review its spending on microfinance initiatives, ensuring that aid is channelled to programmes that can be shown to work through a solid evidence base. In particular, it should carefully scrutinise the effectiveness of microfinance initiatives which have such a central role in the Bangladesh system. The UK should investigate the efficacy of alternative programmes such as universal basic income.
7. The UK should match the EU's commitment that once Bangladesh gains Middle Income Country (MIC), as expected in 2024, it will offer duty-free access to aid available to Least Developed Countries for an additional three years after graduation.

Arms and Military Support

8. The UK should ensure that its 0.7% GDP commitment to overseas development aid is spent only on development programmes, not on military or security measures. The Conflict, Security and Stability Fund budget should be removed from the 0.7% calculation.
9. The UK should adopt a more rigorous and transparent system of arms export licensing that takes human rights into account.
10. The UK should investigate the effects of its training relationship with the Bangladeshi military and security forces, cease any activity linked to human rights abuses, and require credible and regular reporting on the investigation of such abuses, in particular of alleged arrests, disappearances and extra-judicial executions. Any continuing collaboration with Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) should be ended.

Promoting Human Rights in Bangladesh

11. The UK should hold Bangladesh's government to account for arbitrary use of the criminal law and mass dismissals to suppress workers' calls for change. It should acknowledge that exploitation in Bangladesh's labour industry disproportionately affects women and call for an end to gender-based discrimination, violence and harassment in the workplace.
12. The UK should use its diplomatic and economic influence to press for the protection of the rights of women, disabled people and LGBTQ+ people in Bangladesh, and should support grassroots organisations working in this area.
13. The UK should gather data on the treatment of religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities in Bangladesh, and raise this issue in international human rights forums including the UN and Commonwealth. The UK should call upon the Government of Bangladesh to recognise collective rights of the country's 54 indigenous peoples, including the Chittagong Hill Tracts, in particular the right to land ownership and natural resources.

The UK should pressure Bangladesh to end the culture of impunity for perpetrators of communal violence against indigenous peoples and invite engagement with UN human rights mechanisms, including the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

14. The UK should support international monitoring processes to ensure that Bangladesh adheres to its obligations under the UN convention against Torture, the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as the core human rights treaties.

15. The UK should call for Bangladesh's "war on drugs" to be suspended and all allegations of extrajudicial killings to be independently investigated. It should push for the ending of practices such as arbitrary arrest, torture and disappearances.

The UK should demand that Bangladesh immediately disclose the location and detention status of abductees such as the opposition politician, Ilias Ali, and lawyer, Ahmad Bin Quasem, and that it investigate the disappearance of the journalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol. The UK should promote freedom of expression in Bangladesh and call for an end to using the Digital Security Act to prosecute those who hold critical opinions or to block websites simply because they publish material critical of it or members of the governing party,

The Rohingya Crisis

16. The UK should continue to support international efforts to ensure investigation and accountability of those responsible for violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar.
17. The UK should work alongside the international community with direct participation of the Rohingya people to ensure a transparent, safe and sustainable voluntary repatriation exercise. The UK should ensure that the conditions for restitution be satisfied, including that the Rohingya's citizenship rights be addressed, their safety guaranteed by the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees and that appropriate restitution is paid for their hardship.
18. The UK should continue to be at the forefront of the humanitarian response to the Rohingya crisis. As the April-May cyclone season approaches, the UK should continue to work alongside UN agencies - UNICEF, UNHCR, UNFPA, WFP and IOM included - and international and national NGOs to help deliver shelter materials, food assistance, WASH facilities, healthcare services and protection against gender-based violence. The UK should commit funding to the 2020 Joint Response Plan upon its publication.
19. The UK should support the economic absorption and co-existence of the Rohingya with host communities in Cox's Bazar to ensure social cohesion. The UK should support localised development among host communities, including through expanded labour mobility opportunities, private sector investment, special economic zones and education for refugee children. The UK should encourage the Government of Bangladesh to grant the Rohingya formal status as refugees, and lift restrictions on their rights to education, employment and freedom of movement.
20. The UK should publicly call for an immediate end to the Bangladesh government's Internet blackout and phone restrictions at Rohingya refugee camps.

Climate Change

21. The UK should commit to ensuring global temperatures do not rise higher than 1.5°, and should conduct a review into the human rights implications of global temperature rises.