

OHS Initiative for Workers and Community Established In Dhaka with First Year Funding, NGO Bureau Approval

On October 2, 2016, the OHS Initiative for Workers and Community received the legally required approval from the Bangladesh government's NGO Bureau to begin operations, green-lighting its "train-the-trainer" program on workplace health and safety with six leading labor, women's, public health and occupational health and safety (OHS) organizations.

The OHS Initiative Governing Board met on August 31 to approve plans to begin hiring staff, develop Bangla-language materials, and recruit trainers from the member organizations to become grassroots OHS trainers with workers in Bangladesh's garment, construction, shipbreaking and other industries.

The NGO Bureau approval means the OHS Initiative can now receive and begin spending the funds raised for its first year budget and begin operations. More than \$53,000 was contributed by the Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) in the UK, the World Solidarity Movement (WSM) in Belgium, the National Fire Association (NFPA) in the US, LUSH Cosmetics "Charity Pot" in Canada, and a group of anonymous donors in San Francisco, California.

The Occupational Safety, Health and Environment (OSHE) Foundation in Dhaka is serving as the Secretariat of the OHS Initiative, whose offices will be housed in the same building as OSHE in the Mirpur District of Dhaka. The Governing Board formed a recruitment and hiring committee to contract the four staff members envisioned in the first year budget: Project Coordinator, Training Coordinator, Administrative Assistant, and part-time Financial Officer/Accountant. The Chair of the Governing Board is held by the women's rights organization Naripokkho.

Once hired, Initiative staff will begin developing curriculum and materials designed for OHS topics with a group of experienced trainers drawn from the six member organizations. These trainers, already conducting effective



Board members of the OHS Initiative from left to right:
Repon Chowdhury (OSHE) - *Secretary of the Initiative Board*
Tamanna Khan (Naripokkho) - *Chairperson of the Initiative Board*
Kalpona Akter (BCWS) - *Board*
Kutubuddin Ahmed (IndustriALL Bangladesh Council) - *Board*
Ghulam Mustafa Dulal (GK) - *Board*
Sushmita S Preetha (*Country Representative, WRC Bangladesh Office*)
representing Garrett Brown (MHSSN) - *Board*

worker education on a range of topics including labor law, women's rights, and public health issues, will be qualified at the end of the "train-the-trainer" program to expand their repertoire to include key OHS topics. Trainers will also receive skill-building courses from the Initiative on techniques for conducting effective courses with workers with limited formal education and limited time given their work and family responsibilities.

Initiative staff will evaluate, select and adapt from numerous existing OHS materials generated by national and international projects on workplace safety in the garment industry since the Rana Plaza building collapse. Many of these materials have been collected and posted on a Bangla-language webpage of the Labor Occupational Safety and Health (LOSH) program at the University of California in Los Angeles. Initiative staff will customize lesson plans and materials for its audience of grassroots workers and community members.

As Initiative staff begins operations in Dhaka during the fall of 2016, members of the four-organization California Collaborative will continue to raise funds for years two and three of the project.

Member organizations of the OHS Initiative

The OHS Initiative for Workers and Community consists of six Bangladeshi non-governmental organizations. These organizations each have one representative on the Initiative's Governing Board and the California Collaborative has a seventh seat on the Board. The Initiative's member organizations are:

Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS) is one of the country's most prominent labor rights groups. Former garment workers founded BCWS in 2001 to improve working conditions and promote workers' rights by building the capacity of workers to advocate for themselves, and providing services such as labor rights education, leadership training and legal aid.

Bangladesh Institute for Labour Studies (BILS) provides research and information on labor laws and economic issues to unions and worker organizations in a variety of industrial sectors. BILS is widely respected among labor groups and works in an ecumenical fashion with all sectors of the fractured labor movement in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE) is a leading OHS non-governmental organization that conducts training, research, policy advocacy and support services for workers in the garment and shipbreaking industries, among other sectors.

Gonoshasthaya Kendra (GK) is a public health organization with clinics and hospitals serving Bangladesh's poor, including workers in many industries. GK's health facilities in Dhaka and Savar have also treated Rana Plaza collapse survivors and their families, as well as injured workers in numerous other industries.

IndustriALL Bangladesh Council (IBC) is made up of more than 20 trade unions in the garment, chemical and metalworking industries, including a dozen unions in the garment industry. The IBC is the national council of unions affiliated with the Geneva-based IndustriALL Global Union.

Naripokkho is a women's organization that provides information, training and support on gender issues for women workers on topics such as domestic violence and social discrimination. Naripokkho works with garment workers and their families in the Savar industrial area of Dhaka, including survivors of the Rana Plaza building collapse.



Role of California Collaborative

The California Collaborative, formed in 2015 to support the creation of the OHS Initiative, consists of four OHS organizations in the state of California: Hesperian Health Guides in Berkeley; Labor Occupational Health Program (LOHP) at the University of California at Berkeley; Labor Occupational Safety and Health (LOSH) program at the University of California at Los Angeles; and the Maquiladora Health and Safety Support Network (MHSSN) in Berkeley.

The California Collaborative raised the \$53K needed to fund the first year budget of the Initiative in the summer of 2016, and is actively fundraising for the budget for years two and three of the Dhaka project.

The Collaborative will also work with the staff and Governing Board of the Initiative to provide technical assistance, as requested, on both OHS and pedagogical issues, and to provide appropriate curriculum and teaching materials. It is also developing and maintaining the webpage of Bangla-language OHS materials on the LOSH website.

In addition, the MHSSN hosts a quarterly conference call for OHS professionals in North America to report on OHS issues in Bangladesh, covering activities of the OHS Initiative as well as other national and international efforts to improve workplace safety and health in Bangladesh.



Funds needed for Years Two and Three

Planning for an expansion of Initiative staff by hiring additional trainers in both years two and three, the budgets for the Initiative increase to \$65,000 in year two and \$78,000 in year three. The fiscal years for the Initiative begin on October 1, 2017 and October 1, 2018.

Two first-year funders have generously committed to continue to contribute funds: IOSH in the UK will donate 5,000 British pounds each year and the WSM in Belgium will contribute 8,000 Euros in each of the two years. This leaves \$49,400 to be raised before October 2017 and \$62,400 before October 2018.

Renewed appeals will be made to other first-year funders to continue their support as well as reaching out to new potential contributors. The start-up plan for the OHS Initiative calls for it to become increasingly self-sustaining after its first years of operation.

OHS Professionals in the United States Raising Funds for Initiative

Three Past Presidents of the American Industrial Hygiene Association – Barbara Dawson, John Henshaw and Zack Mansdorf – have issued an appeal to AIHA members and other OHS professionals to join them in contributing funds to support the OHS Initiative. Donations – \$2,500 was raised in August 2016 – will go towards providing technical assistance to Initiative staff and to the corps of grassroots OHS trainers being developed in the project.

For more information and to contribute to the AIHA Presidents' Fund

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