

## **‘15m workers lack occupational safety and health across country’**

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Around 15 million workers across the country lack basic health and safety facilities at their workplaces despite the fact that there have been grave accidents and loss of life in the past few years, Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER) Director Karamat Ali said on Tuesday.

Addressing a gathering held to mark the sixth anniversary of the horrific Baldia factory fire blaze that claimed more than 250 lives in 2012, Ali said the government and the employers have not made any improvement in workplaces nor have they made any efforts to implement the law to safeguard the rights and interests of workers.

The burnt building of Ali Enterprises – the factory that was gutted in the 2012 fire – is a stark reminder of the government and employers’ apathy, he said.

The gathering was organised by the Ali Enterprises Factory Fire Affectees Association (AEFFAA) in Baldia Town outside the same two-storey garments manufacturing facility which burned down on September 11, 2012, killing 260 people, including teenaged workers and wounding several others. Families of the victims, trade unionists and sympathisers attended the event.

AEFFAA Chairperson Saeeda Khatoon in her speech lamented that the working conditions in factories reminded her of Ali Enterprises in which her only son, Aijaz, was killed. “We want to save others from what we went through,” she said, thanking the organisations that helped the association in campaigning for justice and workers’ safety.

Dr Carolijn Terwindt, the senior legal adviser at the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, told the affectees that there was a public hearing on November 29 in a German court on their claim against the German company KiK which bought merchandise from Ali Enterprises.

She said that the people offshore express solidarity with the victims and support their struggle. International Labour Rights Forum Director of Campaigns Liana Foxvog said that her organisation was trying to unite workers, trade unionists and consumers to press on the brands and retailers that make most profit in the supply-chain to ensure dignity and safety of the workers at their units. She said that the private social auditing system had failed all over the world as in here.

National Trade Union Federation President Rafiq Baloch said: “Pakistan has become such a country where the upholding of labour laws and constitutional rights has become next to impossible. The institutions formed by the government for welfare of

labourers have failed to discharge their duties and they are fully safeguarding the interests of employers.”

Zaheer Arif, the representative of the International Labour Organization told the gathering that as of now his organisation had verified the claims of 218 victim families for the monthly “long-term” compensation to be given by KiK.

He said the victim families may approach the ILO in case they face difficulties in receiving the amount, and added that the disbursement mechanism made with the Sindh government was transparent. He was hopeful that it will run for a long time.