

Statement of Aminul Islam
June 18, 2010

The Chief Inspectorate of Factories, Mr. Aminul Haque, requested Babul Akhter¹ over cell phone to arrange a meeting among the workers and the Director of Labor to address the recent workers unrest at the Envoy Group Garments, owned by Mr. Abdus Salam Murshidid, the current President of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Export Association (BGMEA).

The meeting among the workers, owners and their representatives, the BGMEA, and the BCWS was set for June 16. It was to take place at the Labor Office in the presence of the Chief Inspectorate of Factories. Though 30 workers had been invited to the meeting, the situation of the Savar Ashulia² was so tense that only 18 of the workers came to the meeting. I arrived at the Labor Office with the workers.

While ascending the stairs to the Labor Office with the workers, Mr. Amin from the National Security Intelligence (NSI) and 30-35 of his secret NSI members detained me and three of the Envoy workers. The workers who were detained were Hira, Alam, and one more, but I can't remember his name. The NSI members imprisoned us in a vehicle and waited for 30 minutes for Babul and Kalpona³ and others from BCWS to show up for the meeting.

When they arrested me they tied my eyes with jute and a towel, handcuffed my hands, and put me in Mr. Amin's car. I had to sit in the back seat between two NSI officers. One officer was in the front seat next to the driver. Amin⁴ sat in another vehicle with the other workers. After waiting for a long time without anybody from BCWS showing up, they started the vehicle and headed to the NSI office which is located at Belly Road. I guessed as much from their conversation.

After we reached the NSI office Amin took me and the other three workers to the ground floor of the office. There they untied my eyes but kept me handcuffed. Amin asked me, "Why did you call these workers here?" I said that Babul had called the workers to the Labor Office for the meeting. Then he asked, "Who would be at the meeting?" I told him the meeting would take place in the presence of the owners, workers, BCWS representatives, BGMEA representatives, and the Chief Inspectorate of Factories. Then he told me, "Who gave authority to Babul to call the meeting? Who gave him power? BCWS is an NGO. Who give them this power? They don't have any right to work with the workers. They will be punished."

Amin and another officer named Rafiqul Islam of NSI then asked, "Why did you stop work at the garments factories? Who ordered you to stop the work? Why? Tell us his name. Tell us if Babul asked you to stop the work at factories. The persons who told you to stop the work at factories should be punished. If you just say that Babul and Kalpona asked you to stop the work at the factories then we will set you free. We will arrest them in a moment and take them here."

¹ Co-Director of the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity.

² Part of Dhaka where Envoy Garments are located.

³ Secretary General of the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity.

⁴ He refers to Amin throughout the testimony as "Amin boss."

He continued, “Don’t you see that Babul is using you and Babul is being used by David?⁵ If we arrest Babul and beat him then he would give your name and David’s name to survive. If you give us Babul’s name, then we will leave you and capture Babul and get him to name ACILS and David. Then we wipe out the Solidarity Center from Bangladesh.”⁶

They addressed me with the inferior pronoun, “you,” without showing respect. They ordered: “You must listen to our instruction and submit a written statement to us against ACILS and Babul and Kalpona. Then we will take it to the USA Embassy and focusing on you we will assemble a human chain and agitate in front of the USA Embassy. Then we will prove there that BCWS is a bad organization, harmful to the country. Then we will wipe out BCWS and ACILS, all of them, from Bangladesh.”

Amin and Rafiq were saying all these things. Then I said that we never told workers to stop the work. Neither Babul nor Kalpona ever supported any illegal task or unlawful demand. After I said this, those two persons started to beat me with a wooden stick and a thick, hard beating stick. They were hurting me at the joints of the bones of my body. My arm, knee, and ball-joints were their target. One of them reversed my legs with a wooden stick and ordered me to do what his boss said and provide a written statement according to their demands. “Otherwise we will kill you,” they said. The other workers were crying loudly, seeing this situation.

Then they gave me a white piece of paper with a carbon paper and a pen. Once Amin told me, “You just write Babul’s name. We will fix it with Babul and leave you forever.”

But I didn’t follow their order. I wrote what I was thinking. When they found that I didn’t follow their orders they started beating me again with the wooden stick. Suddenly one of them kicked my head and I lost consciousness. How much time I was unconscious I can’t remember. When I became conscious they again ordered me to give them a written document against ACILS and BCWS. They beat me when I refused them. They were doing this for a long time, as they wanted a written document against BCWS and ACILS.

I didn’t follow their orders. When they found that I wrote what I was thinking they started to beat me again. Then they told me, “Ok. You could write as you wish, but now write what I say, that you have made a mistake, and that by agitating workers you have committed a crime and for that you beg pardon of us.” Then I gave them the statement, saying that I am not involved in any workers’ unrest but if they feel I have made any mistake I apologize for that. Then they gave me some conditions. The conditions were as follows:

1. For the next two months I could not meet or talk with Babul and Kalpona.
2. I couldn’t work for BCWS anymore.

⁵ “David” is a reference to the Director of the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS) of Bangladesh.

⁶ His interrogators want Aminul to provide a statement that Babul ordered him to instigate worker unrest. With that statement they would arrest Babul. Then they would extort a similar statement from Babul, saying that the ACILS instructed him to incite worker unrest. And with such evidence they would be able to expel ACILS from Bangladesh.

3. If I met Babul or Kalpona, or worked at BCWS then I would be killed in a cross-fire⁷ and my wife and children would become orphans.
4. I would have to live at my father-in-law's house at Serpur or I would have to live in Chittagong and I would have to present myself at the NSI office twice daily and keep communicating with Amin.

Then they asked me, "How much money do you earn every month?" How much money do you get from Sasha?" I told them I receive 7,062 Bangladeshi takas from BCWS and 2,045 Bangladeshi takas from the Sasha Denim factory. Then they asked me, "How many members are there in your family?" I replied I have a mother, wife, two sons and one daughter. Then they teased me, saying, "With such an amount how you live like a landlord?"⁸

They kept threatening me that they would kill me by cross fire, or beat me until I bleed to death. They showed me a blooded carpet and said that they would injure me like Mahmudur Rahman.⁹ Once they said, "If you don't answer us, we take you to the Kapashia jungle¹⁰ and take you down by cross fire. No one will find you. No one even knows you are with us."

Then they played a surveillance tap which had recorded who I had been talking to the previous several days. They said that they have BCWS's staff members' entire surveillance tap and they kept it as a record. Then they used bad languages against Kalpona and said that the BCWS is a poisonous insect. They also told the three workers that "these insects are the main problem of yours."

Then at 5:20pm the NSI officials let the three workers free. At 5:30pm they took me in a Pajero Jeep and went to the Momenshing-Serpur-Tangail bus stand.

They bought a ticket from Shopna Transport for the Momenshing route. Around 5:40pm the bus left Dhaka towards Serpur. I asked them so many times where they were taking me, but they didn't reply. They used bad language and threatened me. They placed me in a seat in the middle of the bus and one of them sat beside me. Two of them sat in front of me. When I wanted to talk to my wife they didn't let me. When I cried and requested over and over to talk to my wife they gave me the driver's cell phone and let me talk to my wife.

Then I talked to my wife. By trickery I also talked with one of my colleagues, Nasrin. I said, "Tell Kalpona and Babul to hide." It seemed to me that they could arrest Babul and Kalpona. Then they suddenly took the cell phone and I couldn't have contact with my office or my family. When I felt that I had to use the toilet and requested them to let me go they were rude with me and said to do it on the bus.

⁷ In other words, his assassination would be covered up in a staged cross-fired incident.

⁸ Amin used to work in the Sasha Denim factory, where he was elected President of the Workers Representation and Welfare Committee, a body of workers required by law in factories in the export processing zones. After he was illegally fired from Sasha Denim, the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority ordered him reinstated. The factory refused but is paying him an allowance while the court case is pending. Despite earning both the BCWS salary and the Sasha Denim allowance, it does not appear to his interrogators that he earns much money. They imply that he leads an expensive life (which he and his colleagues deny) and must have other income.

⁹ A journalist and publisher of the Amar Desh, a Bengali daily newspaper.

¹⁰ A lowland, waterlogged jungle area.

It was late night, at 11:00pm, when the bus reached the Momenshing bus stand. I told them I felt so hungry and I needed food. They permitted me to get off the bus to buy food but one of them escorted me.

I went to a fruit shop and was pretending to buy fruit. The man who came with me was sitting on a chair in the fruit shop smoking. Suddenly I ran away and hid myself. They were shouting, “Thief, thief” and, “Catch him, catch him.” But they couldn’t catch me.

I entered a house and requested the people to hide me in their house. First they didn’t agree but later they let me enter their house and helped me hide. At 5:30am I got a ride to a train towards Dhaka. I sat down and requested to use the cell phone of another traveler who sat beside me. I reached Nasir and then Kalpona. With the help of Kalpona I came back to Dhaka and went down to the Airport railway station inside Dhaka. Then my colleague rescued me from the Airport railway station and at that time I was too injured to move.

Now I’m living in extreme anxiety. I don’t even know what I should do now. I can’t walk. I can’t even move because of the pain that I got from the beating. I can’t sleep. Nightmares of torture won’t let me sleep.