



Submission for paper to be presented at th XII Global Labour University Conference 2017

Topic 2: Global supply chains and implications for labour:

The Bangladesh Accord as a “model” for new global framework agreements?

In the domain of production in global supply chains, serious violations of fundamental labour standards are found time and time again, especially at the bottom end of global value chains. Facing these problems, global union federations started already about 20 years ago to conclude global framework agreements (GFAs) with transnational companies or groups (Telljohann et al, International framework agreements: a stepping stone towards the internationalization of industrial relations?, with further citations). Although initially GFAs were fairly rudimentary and contained little more than the ILO core labour standards, such agreements have developed further and now not unusually contain dedicated rules on implementation and monitoring (Zimmer, Entwicklungsperspektiven transnationaler Kollektivverhandlungen in Europa, EuZA 2013, p. 252). In contrast to unilateral CSR instruments, global framework agreements are the product of negotiations and thus an instrument of industrial relations (Zimmer, Will Corporate Social Responsibility Help to Improve Working Conditions? Beijing 2012, p. 260).

With the collapse of the Rana Plaza garment factory in Bangladesh in April 2013, where more than 1,100 workers lost their lives, with many others seriously injured, at the latest, the failure of voluntary regulation of companies' responsibilities for their supply chains became an international issue. Taking advantage of public pressure in that situation and with support from advocating NGOs, the global trade union federations UNI Global Union and IndustriAll reached an agreement on building safety and fire prevention with more than 220 transnational brand companies purchasing in Bangladesh. The »Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh« (Accord) is remarkable in a number of respects and sets new standards with regard to bindingness and implementation. In particular the establishment of a court of arbitration whose verdicts are legally enforceable, the provisions on transparency.

The presentation will outline the development of global framework agreements as a means of the global union movement and discuss the question, whether the Accord is a unique instrument, which is the result of a unique situation, or if it can nevertheless be categorized as a (special) global framework agreement, which lays down new benchmarks that are milestones which will influence future transnational agreements. The analysis will be taken from a legal, as well as a political point of view.

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