

Models join protest at NY fashion week

NEW YORK CITY, USA: Models joined labour activists at New York fashion week to protest clothing brand Nautica over its parent company's failure to sign an agreement to improve conditions in Bangladeshi factories.



As Nautica unveiled its spring menswear collection on the catwalks at the Lincoln Centre, a handful of people picketed outside, holding boards which read: "No one should die for fashion."

"Nautica don't throw workers overboard," read another, as fashionistas dressed to the nines rushed to the Nautica show.

Liana Foxvog of the International Labour Rights Forum said the protesters were demanding that VF corporation, which produces scores of popular clothing brands such as Wrangler, Lee Jeans, Timberland and Eastpak, sign the accord.

In the wake of a series of fatal clothing factory fires, and the devastating factory collapse in April which left 1,129 dead, 86 companies signed the accord to protect the safety of workers who make their clothing.

They include well-known US brands, Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger, Abercrombie & Fitch and American Eagle, although the majority are European retailers such as H&M and Zara.

Kalpona Akter, executive director of the Bangladesh Centre for Worker Solidarity, was also at the Big Apple's premier fashion event, imploring the retailer, one of the world's largest, to step up.

'Retailers know factories are unsafe'

She hit out at "retailers like VF who know their factories are unsafe and (are) not taking any action."

On its website, VF states it does not have a business relationship with any of the factories in the collapsed building but says it works hard to ensure a safe working environment for workers sewing its clothes in Bangladesh.

However according to Foxvog a December 2010 fire that claimed 29 lives took place at a factory that produced clothes for VF.

"They prioritise profits over people's lives," she said.

A handful of models also joined the picket such as Sara Ziff who said unsafe labour practices continue because people turn a blind eye to them.

"Ten years ago, when I modeled for Nautica, I didn't think about the garment workers who made the clothes I was wearing," said Ziff.

However after a visit to the factories in that country she said she felt a moral responsibility to expose the unsafe working conditions under which clothes are produced and the plight of the workers who produce them.

The April factory collapse highlighted appalling conditions in Bangladesh's 4,500 garment factories, where workers toil for between 10 and 12 hours a day for a basic monthly wage of about US\$40.

Foxvog said initial investigations into factory conditions under the accord were starting this month and initial reports were expected by the end of the year.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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