

FRANÇOIS SIMARD



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Association québécoise
des organismes de
coopération internationale



The AQOCI dedicates this graphic novel to the workers of Bangladesh and to all those who fight to remove exploitation from labour. We would especially like to thank Kalpona Akter, Founder and Executive Director of the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity, who inspired this project.

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With great sensitivity, François Simard transports us to the heart of the tragic events of the Rana Plaza factory collapse in this graphic novel examining issues of responsibility and solidarity, both at local and global level.

MADE IN

RANA PLAZA

aqoci.qc.ca
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SO THAT EVERYONE ECONOMIC JUSTICE CAN GET THEIR DUE. ●

Why do we need to talk about economic justice?

April 24, 2023 will be the 10-year anniversary of the deadly Rana Plaza building collapse in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. The building housed multiple garment factories where thousands of workers laboured for long hours—specifically, female textile and garment workers. Textile products make up over 80% of the goods and services exported by Bangladesh. It is the second-largest clothing exporter in the world, after China. Many fashion brands sold here, in Canada, source from these factories.

In the following pages, we'll explore the story of Rana Plaza, now a symbol of the problems with "fast fashion." We hope that this will encourage you to act in solidarity with Bangladeshi workers in order to create a world filled with justice and solidarity.

DHAKA, CAPITAL OF BANGLADESH





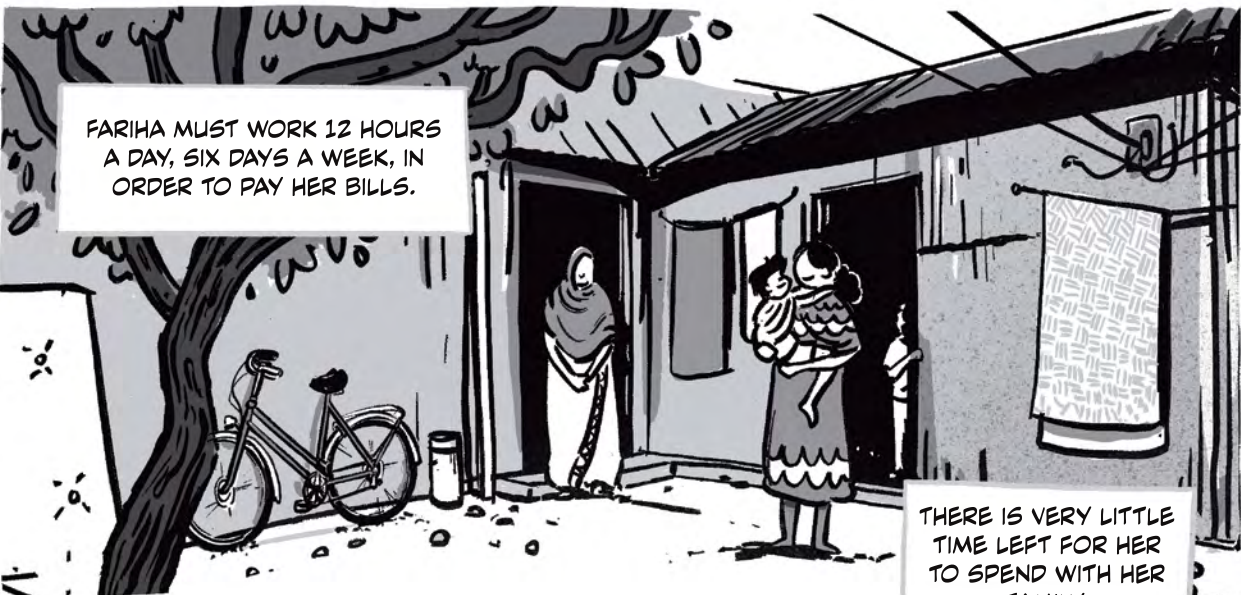
LIKE FOUR MILLION OTHER WORKERS IN BANGLADESH, SHE IS A SEAMSTRESS IN A GARMENT FACTORY.

SHE MAKES CLOTHES FOR SOME OF THE LARGEST WESTERN BRANDS.

WALMART, JOE FRESH, THE CHILDREN'S PLACE, BENETTON AND MANGO.



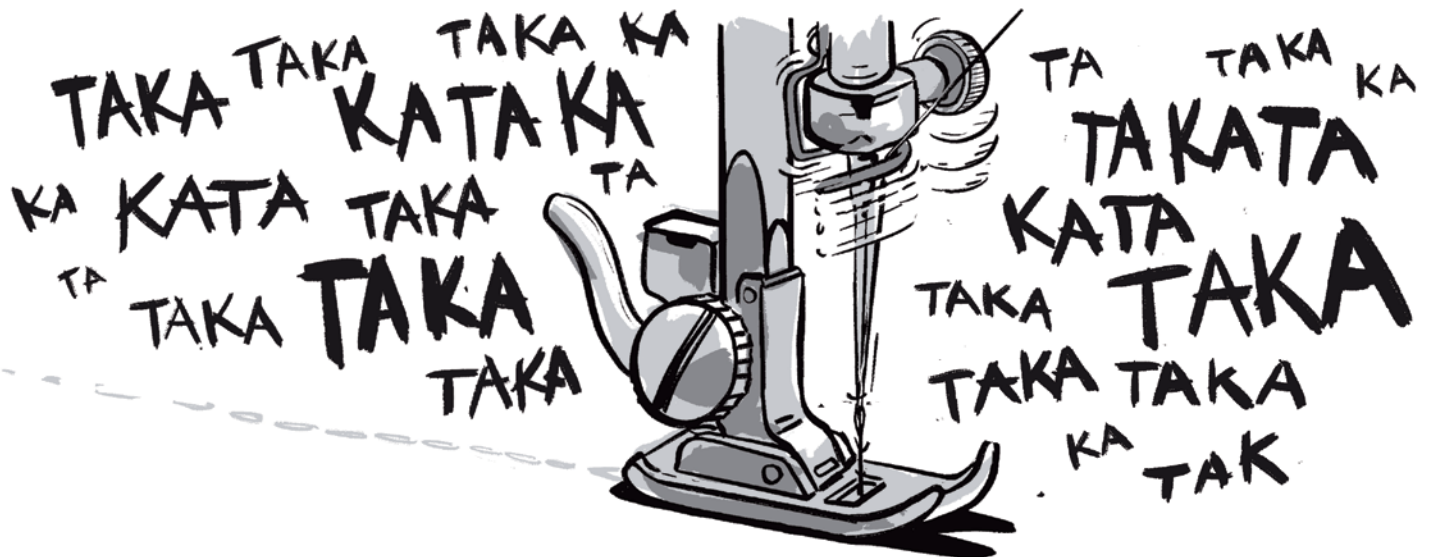
FARIHA MUST WORK 12 HOURS A DAY, SIX DAYS A WEEK, IN ORDER TO PAY HER BILLS.

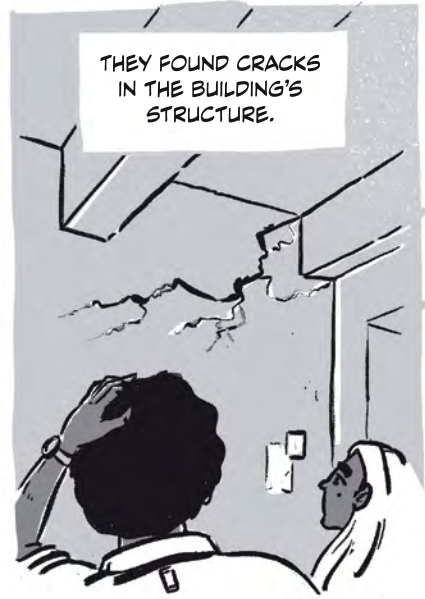
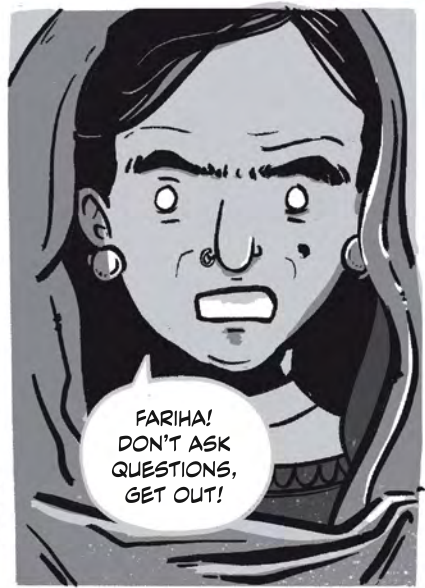


THE FACTORY WHERE
MY DAUGHTER
WORKS IS ON THE
TOP TWO STORIES
OF RANA PLAZA.

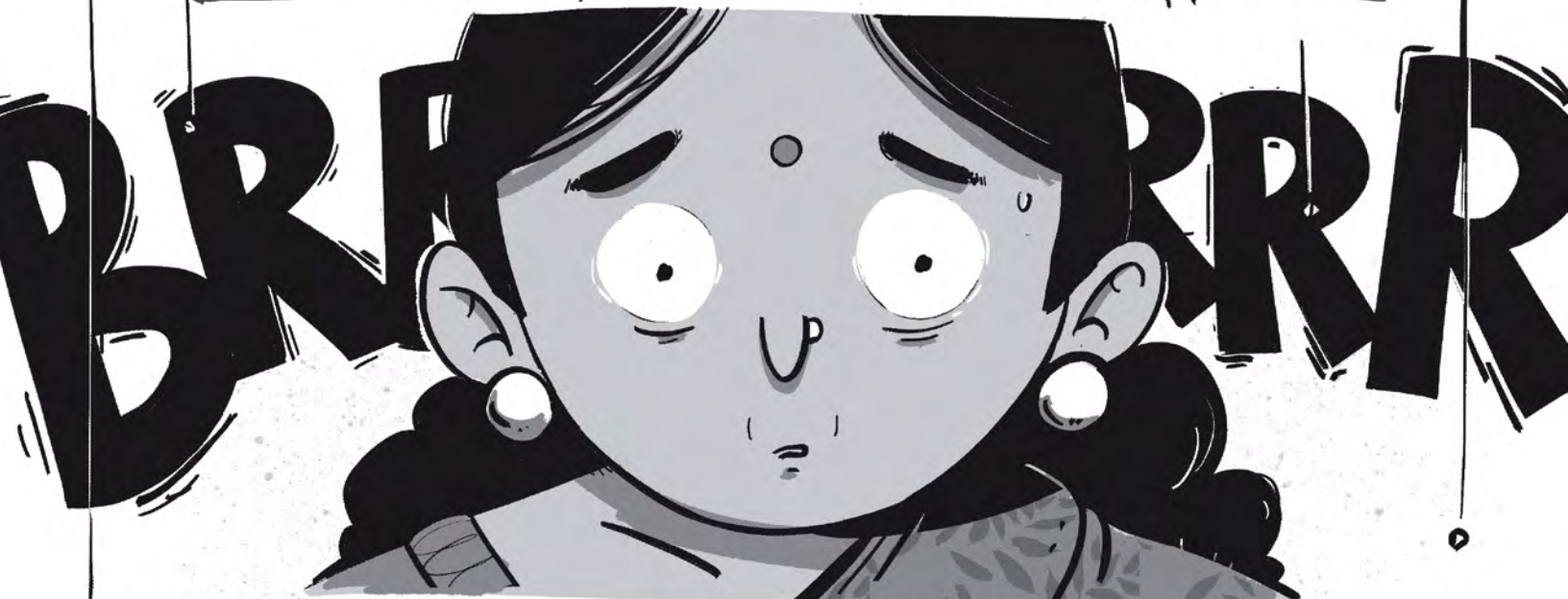
MORE THAN
5,000 PEOPLE
WORK THERE
EVERY DAY.













GOOD EVENING. TRAGIC
EVENTS TODAY IN DHAKA,
THE CAPITAL OF
BANGLADESH.

A BUILDING COLLAPSED
WHILE OVER 2,000
WORKERS WERE INSIDE.

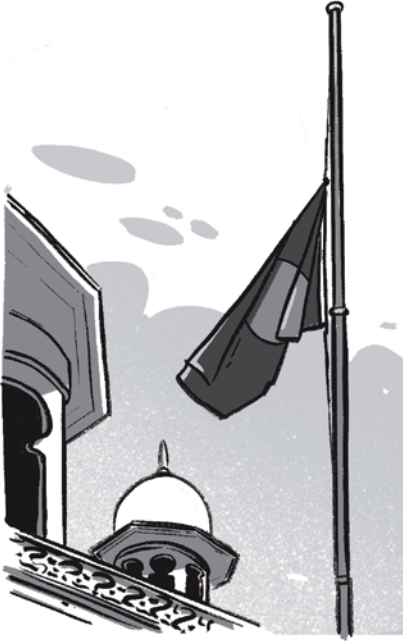
THE LATEST REPORTS INDICATE
THAT OVER A HUNDRED HAVE
DIED AND OVER A THOUSAND
WERE WOUNDED.



FIRST RESPONDERS DID
THEIR BEST TO FIND
SURVIVORS TRAPPED IN
THE RUBBLE OF CONCRETE
AND STEEL.



THE FLAGS ARE AT HALF-MAST TODAY IN BANGLADESH AS THE COUNTRY ENTERS A DAY OF MOURNING IN COMMEMORATION OF THE RANA PLAZA VICTIMS.



SEVERAL DAYS AFTER THE WORST INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENT IN THE COUNTRY'S HISTORY, REPORTS OUT OF DHAKA ONLY GROW MORE SOMBER.



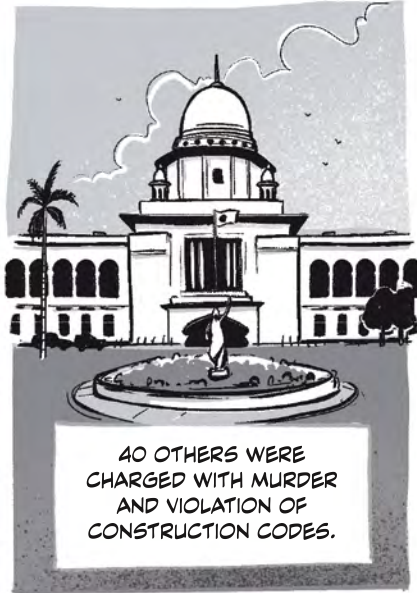
DOZENS OF PEOPLE ARE STILL MISSING. FAMILIES HOPE THAT THEIR LOVED ONES WILL RETURN SAFE AND SOUND.



MOHAMED SOHEL RANA, 35, WAS ARRESTED AS HE TRIED TO FLEE THE COUNTRY. HE WILL BE CALLED TO FACE THE CHARGES AGAINST HIM.



SOHEL IS NOT
THE ONLY PERSON
RESPONSIBLE FOR
MY DAUGHTER'S
DEATH.



40 OTHERS WERE
CHARGED WITH MURDER
AND VIOLATION OF
CONSTRUCTION CODES.

ORGANIZATIONS AND
SOME OF THE BIG
CLOTHING COMPANIES
SENT MONEY.



BUT THAT MONEY
WON'T BRING
MY DAUGHTER
BACK...

THIS TRAGEDY MEANT
THAT DEFENDERS OF
WORKERS' RIGHTS WERE
ABLE TO MAKE MAJOR
IMPROVEMENTS IN BUILDING
SAFETY IN THE TEXTILE
INDUSTRY.

UNFORTUNATELY,
WORKING
CONDITIONS FOR
WORKERS ARE
STILL JUST AS
POOR.

YET THESE
WOMEN
CONTINUE
TO FIGHT, DAY
AFTER DAY.



AMONG THEM IS
KALPONA AKTER, A
PASSIONATE ACTIVIST
WHO TRAVELS THE
WORLD TO ADVOCATE
FOR GARMENT
WORKERS.



PEOPLE EVERYWHERE CAN
SHOW SOLIDARITY BY
LEARNING MORE ABOUT
THE STORIES BEHIND THE
CLOTHES THAT THEY BUY.



IN HONOUR OF THE 1,130 VICTIMS,
THE 2,500 PEOPLE WHO WERE WOUNDED,
AND THEIR FAMILIES AND LOVED ONES.

FRANÇOIS

**This commemorative monument was erected at the site of the tragedy by the Bangladeshi government in memory of the victims of the Rana Plaza collapse.*

Even working 12 to 15 hours a day, many textile workers in Bangladesh don't make enough to cover their family's basic needs.

True ☐ False ☐

Child labour has been in decline around the world over recent years.

True ☐ False ☐

Since 2020, due to the pandemic, the fortunes of the 10 richest men in the world have decreased significantly.

True ☐ False ☐

Governments cannot stop human rights abuses committed by private companies

True ☐ False ☐

The majority of people at risk of human trafficking and forced labour are women and girls.

True ☐ False ☐

True or false?





ANSWERS

ANSWERS

ANSWERS

ANSWERS

ANSWERS

ANSWERS

ANSWERS

ANSWERS

1: TRUE While safety in factories has improved considerably following the Rana Plaza collapse and the efforts brought by the Bangladeshi workers' movements, the starvation wages remain unchanged. Workers' average monthly wage of 8,000 takas (\$125) is one of the lowest among the Ready-made garment (RMG) manufacturing countries.

Source: [Steelworkers Humanity Fund, Not Even the Bare Minimum](#), January 2021.

2: FALSE It's estimated that 160 million children are currently victims of forced labour, which deprives them of their childhoods, their potential and their dignity, and harms their physical and mental development. Since 2016, the number of children doing dangerous work has increased by 6.5 million, totalling 79 million in 2021.

Source: UNICEF, [Ten Things You Didn't Know about Child Labour](#), June 2021.

3: FALSE Unfortunately, this is false. The wealth of the 10 richest men in the world doubled during the pandemic, while the income of 99% of the rest of the world decreased. Inequality, both within countries and between countries, has only continued to increase. This trend was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sources: Oxfam-Québec, [Inequality Kills](#), January 2022.

4: FALSE On the contrary! Nations, governments and parliaments have the means to pass laws and implement legal mechanisms to protect communities from human rights abuses and environmental destruction on the part of multinational corporations. In fact, multiple international treaties, like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, state that they are obligated to protect these rights. Unfortunately, many governments fail to meet their human rights obligations.

Source: Amnesty International, [Mining and Human Rights in Senegal](#), May 2014.

5: TRUE Millions of people around the world are at risk of human trafficking. Approximately 70% of victims are women and girls, and more than a third are children. The majority of these people were forced to leave their homes due to armed conflict, socio-economic struggles, or natural disasters. Human trafficking victims are primarily compelled into sexual exploitation (50%) or forced labour (40%).

Source: AQOCI, [Ce qu'il faut dénoncer : la traite des filles et des femmes](#), November 2021.



Poverty wages. That is what the women and men who make clothes in Bangladesh's garment factories are paid. This is a fact and it has been this way for a long time. It was true when I started working in a garment factory as a child more than 20 years ago.

Every day we are confronted by the desperation, heartbreak, anger, as well as courage of workers trapped in poverty. During our long struggle for better wages and working conditions we have seen progress and setbacks, but the fact remains that the world's biggest retailers and fashion brands have built their profits on the poverty wages paid to women and men working for them in their supply chains.

When I was younger and at times felt powerless to bring change, my mother told me, 'Always someone can start.' Canadian companies can start. They have a responsibility to workers in their supply chain to pay living wages, respect workers' rights, and to cushion the impact of COVID and make sure workers and their families survive.

- **Kalpona Akter**

President of the Bangladesh Garment and Industrial Workers Federation and Founder and Executive Director of the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity

Source: Fonds humanitaire des Métallos, Même pas le strict minimum, January 2021.



Ready to take action?

Sign these petitions for a new law on human rights, the environment and Canadian businesses abroad:



aqoci.qc.ca



oxfam.ca/what-she-makes





“Thank you, Étienne, for always being there, ensconced in my mess. Thank you to the Thursday night crew—I’m grateful for your online presence. Thank you to Marie-Sophie for your involvement and insight. A huge thank you—and all my love—to Isabelle, Christophe and Elliot. You have always been there with a listening ear, ideas and support for me and my comic book adventures. And THANK YOU to l’AQOCI for their faith in this project.”

François Simard has worked in the fields of graphic and web design for over twenty years. At night, once his children are tucked in, he dives into his universe behind his drawing board. After a few illustration contracts, François reconnected with his childhood dream of drawing comic books. This dream came true in 2022 with the release of his first professional comic book, published with Éditions Sawin. He had the opportunity to repeat the experience in 2023 for l’AQOCI, on a project close to his heart: Made in Rana Plaza.

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