September 21, 2012

To the New York Times,

We are writing to request a correction to three points in the article “Inspectors Certified Pakistani Factory as Safe Before Disaster” on 19 September 2012:

"The two inspectors were working on behalf of Social Accountability International, a nonprofit monitoring group based in New York that obtains much of its financing from corporations and relies on 21 affiliates around the world to do most of its inspections."

The second paragraph (excerpted above) erroneously states the auditors of Ali Enterprises were working on behalf of SAI. They were working as employees of RINA, and RINA was hired by the factory to conduct an audit evaluating compliance with the SA8000 Standard. SAI does not inspect factories.

”"Even after a decade or more of such private monitoring efforts, these programs — no matter how well funded or designed or how well trained their auditors are — simply do not in and of themselves produce sustained and significant improvements in labor standards in most supply chain factories,” Professor Locke said."

The Richard Locke quotation (excerpted above) at least strongly implied that we assert audits create change. No, we do not. Audits gather data that can identify needs for change, for training and for confirming performance.

"A prominent factory monitoring group heavily financed by industry gave a clean bill of health to a Pakistani apparel plant last month, just weeks before a fire engulfed the premises and killed nearly 300 workers, many of them trapped behind locked exit doors."

"The two inspectors were working on behalf of Social Accountability International, a nonprofit monitoring group based in New York that obtains much of its financing from corporations and relies on 21 affiliates around the world to do most of its inspections."

Third, the first and second paragraphs (excerpted above) imply that we are a corporate tool. SAI is financed by government and foundation grants as much as by corporate fees, and both streams appropriately fund training, capacity building and technical assistance.

And, finally, we do believe that despite the odds, our work matters and that both training and the use of SA8000 have had, and have the potential to, improve working conditions in many places; this is despite the fact that we are a relatively small multi-stakeholder organization.

Social Accountability International (SAI)