

SUNDAY OBSERVER

Women apparel workers demand dignity and recognition

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Members of Sri Lanka Chamber of Garment Exporters

Women apparel workers commended the efforts taken by the apparel industry to ensure the well-being of the workforce which makes the biggest contribution to the economy.

The importance of creating an institution in the garment industry for women to pursue higher education relevant to their occupations was emphasised.

The women representatives of the Sri Lanka Chamber of Garment Exporters (SLCGE) and the Joint Apparel Association Forum, made these remarks during a press conference in Colombo to mark International Women's Day.

The press conference focused on the welfare and betterment of the living standards of women engaged in various occupations in the apparel industry and the representatives emphasised the importance of taking steps not to limit the recognition of the role of women in the garment industry to only Women's Day.

Women make up about 85% of the workforce in the apparel industry in Sri Lanka, especially in the rural areas and is one of the key employment generating sectors to strengthen the economy of women.

A woman apparel worker said that the garment industry has become a leading partner in the flow of women's employment, creating hundreds of thousands of jobs for women and giving them the opportunity to play a role in the economy.

The apparel industry is contributing significantly to the uplifting of the living standards of women involved in it while working towards enhancing their lifestyle.

Many women who attended the press conference were of the view that women in the garment industry have a high standard of living and play a dignified role in uplifting the lives standards of their family members.

“The media and teledramas always showcase women workers in the apparel industry as an underprivileged and less fortunate group of people. This is not entirely true,” a representative said.

“The women in the garment industry have the opportunity to strengthen their future through promotions and pay raises based on the quality of work, and the opportunities and privileges available to them are immeasurable,” an apparel worker said. In the garment industry, which is mainly dominated by females, employers pay special attention to their problems and make a significant contribution to making their economy self-sufficient by providing incentives, attendance allowances and other benefits in addition to the monthly salary, free uniforms and transport.

A spokeswoman for the apparel industry said that the entertainment, annual outings and free meals were a big boost.

The speakers also commended the management of the garment industry for taking steps to address the day-to-day economic problems of their employees and taking steps to pay the salaries and other incentives on time, even during the Covid-19 pandemic which has greatly affected the industries around the world.

The women who participated in the event commended the employers for focusing more on the health of their employees, adhering to the rules and regulations imposed by the Ministry of Health due to Covid-19, and for setting the stage for the continuation of the manufacturing process and securing their jobs.

The garment workers also expressed their gratitude to the management for setting up special quarantine centres for their employees who have been infected with Covid-19, and also their close associates.

“In the media all you see is the condemning of the professional dignity of women entering the garment industry.

Through works of art and other means of media, it is necessary to give a correct picture and take steps to avoid that situation,” the women who attended the press conference said.