Assad and Walmart: Mass Murderers?

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By Peter Dreier, Truthout | Op-Ed

Why all the outrage over the murdered Syrians and so little about the more than 1,000 innocent Bangladeshi garment workers killed in April's factory collapse? Is a government killing its own people worse than a global corporation's complicity when workers toil in deadly dangerous conditions?

More than 1,000 innocent Syrians were recently killed by poison gas.

Gas victim, Syria. (Photo: Ninian Reid / Flickr).

Over 1,000 innocent Syrians were killed by poison gas. (top photo). Over 1,000 innocent Bangladesh garment workers were killed when a huge factory building collapsed in April (bottom photo of mass grave).

The relatives of a victim of the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory building grieve among bodies from the disaster at a morgue in Dhaka, Bangladesh, May 5, 2013. The anger over the Rana Plaza factory collapse has intensified the pressure on a small Bangladeshi lab straining to find DNA matches for about 300 unidentified victims. (Taslima Akhter / The New York Times).

The Syrian government is responsible for the first mass killing. Wal-Mart, which (according to the New York Times) knew about the dangerous conditions in the Bangladesh factories that make its clothes, and did nothing, is responsible for the second mass killing. Wal-Mart actually blocked efforts to upgrade factory conditions in Bangladesh.

Why all the outrage about the first murders but not the second?

Why is the U.S. government ready to go to war against Syria but not even punish or pressure Wal-Mart?

Are some innocent victims' lives worth more than others?

Why is Assad more of a criminal than Mike Duke, Wal-Mart CEO?

Is it worse when a government kills its own people than when a global corporation looks the other way when workers toil in deadly dangerous conditions?

The Bangladesh workers complained about the building's dangers and were told that if they didn't come to work, they'd lose their jobs. Instead they lost their lives. And Wal-Mart still won't sign an agreement with other big retailers to improve factory conditions!

The deaths of the Bangladesh workers were not the result of an act of God or nature. They were not the result of Wal-Mart's reluctant compliance with Bangladesh's weak workplace safety laws. They were the result of Wal-Mart's willful indifference to basic, decent standards of workplace safety. Just like Assad, Wal-Mart -- that is, the company's CEO and top executives, who put profits over human life -- has blood on its hands.

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