



Garment worker Firoz Hossen survived the world's deadliest accident in the garment industry. FWF talked to him in Savar, Bangladesh – February 2014

'The scariest moment was when I saw the whole building was gone'

Marker man Firoz Hossen, 40 years old, had worked in the Rana Plaza building for five years when, on the morning of 23 April 2013, he entered the garment factory to start his shift. "I immediately noticed that there was unrest and panic. My colleagues had spotted a big crack in one of the pillars on the third floor, and there were cracks in the walls as well."

The factory management send staff home so engineers could examine the building. The next morning Firoz went back to the factory, not convinced it was safe. "I didn't want to go inside but I was forced to. I was still scared by what I had seen the day before." Then the owner addressed the workers through the intercom: 'You don't need to be afraid. Please start working'. "But no one did. Everyone was scared."

Shaking

"When I entered the cutting section, suddenly the electricity was gone. When I looked up, I saw pieces of the ceiling coming down. Within a short time, there was a lot of dust. I couldn't see anything anymore. The whole building was shaking and I got stuck between bricks that fell down. Using my mobile phone's flashlight, I could see other workers lying on the floor, still alive."

A part of the roof came down in an angle; an open space was created underneath, where four workers could hide, including Firoz. "Afterwards it turned out that was what saved me. We realised that if the roof came down entirely, we would all die. We started screaming for help and put bricks under one side of the roof to support it."

"I called my wife and asked her to forgive me for all the bad things I did in my life. I also tried to get hold of some of my Rana Plaza colleagues. At that time I still believed it was only our floor that had collapsed and that all the other workers were fine."

Hours of crawling

"One guy took the lead and went exploring the area, crawling. He came back telling us he might have found an escape route. While crawling slowly through open spaces in the rubble, I saw dead bodies, and workers who lost limbs. At that time, I realised that more floors had probably collapsed. I tried



to save two colleagues who were trapped, but I wasn't able to. One of them had lost a couple of fingers. Finally, after hours of crawling, we reached an opening. A rescue team pulled us out."

Once outside, Firoz was shocked. "I stood up, looked around and saw that the whole building was gone. That was extremely scary. I wanted to go back inside. I couldn't accept that other people were dying and I was still alive." The rescue team convinced Firoz he had to go to a hospital. Although bricks had hit his arm and he had crawled for five long hours, Firoz had no permanent physical injuries.

But mentally he is still suffering. He can't erase the image of his wounded and dying colleagues in Rana Plaza. Loud noises make him feel tense and his new job, in another garment factory, doesn't help to recover from the mental trauma. "Whenever one of the machines makes an unexpected sound, I get scared. I can't handle fire drills. I already run out before it starts. My family tells me I shake and yell in my sleep."

Grocery shop

Unlike many other survivors, Firoz already received compensation money: 45.000 taka (418 euros) from one of the brands sourcing at Rana Plaza. But it wasn't enough. He had to borrow 33.000 taka (306 euros) for medical expenses. He's still paying it back, with a high interest. And in the meantime Firoz needs to take care of his family, earning 10.000 taka (93 euros) per month.

Although he believes working conditions are acceptable in his new factory, Firoz wants to go back to the village where he grew up. Start a little business, maybe a grocery shop. Compensation money would be more than welcome. Firoz's two daughters are growing up fast and he would never want for them to work in a garment factory too.

"Profit is the only thing that matters to factory owners", he concludes. Firoz believes that they are the ones who should be paying the victims. "The owners fooled all the workers. This was not an accident, this was a mass killing. If they would have cared about the workers, this would never have happened."