Just over two months into my tenure as the president of the Fair Labor Association, I welcome the opportunity to gather together with the Board of Directors and FLA affiliates. We begin the year ready to meet our near-term goals, while also looking to the future, to prepare longer-term plans that advance the FLA's mission to protect workers' rights in supply chains across the globe.

We also welcome the FLA's new Chief Financial Officer, Cheryl Topping, to this Board meeting. I offer my profound appreciation to Cheryl for her work in the past four weeks to assume the day-to-day financial management of the organization. I have been working closely with Cheryl since her official start date in January, and can confirm that the FLA is operating from a position of financial integrity and strength.

I’d also like to commend the interim leadership team for their work to guide the FLA in between presidents, the full Senior Leadership Team for its steadfastness during the most recent time of transition, and the entire staff for the hard work and passion that are the lifeblood of the organization. With a solid foundation of strong leadership and the indefatigable energy of the staff, the FLA is ready to make progress – to build on the work of the past, and to usher in new ideas, new partnerships, and new ways of working together to advance the common goal we share of improving working conditions worldwide.

In the near-term, we will focus on three broad goals.

### 1. STRENGTHENING OUR CORE WORK

When I look at the opportunities for FLA improvement, I see a number of initiatives already underway for delivering on the promise of the FLA’s unique work with companies, universities, and civil society organizations.

The Business Accountability Team anticipates a year of headquarter-level accountability work that brings more Participating Suppliers forward for accreditation of their social compliance program than ever before. While we of course applaud every company that succeeds in implementing a robust social compliance program at the headquarter level, we especially look forward to having more suppliers among our accredited companies – to model what an effective supplier program looks like, and to bring greater balance between buyer and supplier voices within the FLA.

Our Workplace Accountability Team looks forward getting an earlier start on the SCI cycle this year, potentially as soon as next month, March. In the past, this cycle has started later, with assessments clustered in the final months of the year. As the total number of SCI assessments will be increasing in 2016, due to the entry into the due diligence cycle of several companies with a large supplier base, getting an earlier start will provide multiple benefits. We will spread assessments throughout the year for companies that have asked for this, and we’ll improve the timeliness the FLA’s public reporting on assessment results.

Our Stakeholder Services Team continues its series of training opportunities and is developing materials for companies to provide guidance on the individual Principles of Fair Labor and Responsible Sourcing and Production. The University Program will be working on new Principles for university engagement with the FLA, and all of these tools and training opportunities will enhance companies’ and universities’ effectiveness in protecting workers.

We have also re-launched the search for our next CSO Engagement Director, with the goal of bringing renewed energy to this part of our organization. We know we have work to do to enlarge the CSO Caucus, deepen our engagement with local and international workers’ rights organizations, and ensure that the CSO perspective informs all aspects of the FLA’s work, including our accreditation program, our third-party complaint process, our public reporting, and our due diligence.

As I learn more about the functioning of all of these core FLA teams, I look forward to working with the program directors and the FLA staff to continue improving what we offer to affiliates, and strengthening how those offerings contribute to the success of the core mission of the FLA.
2. BUILDING TOWARD THE FUTURE
Two important ongoing work plans are already bringing forward new ways of implementing the FLA mission; it’s an exciting time to assume the leadership of this organization, in the midst of so much innovation. I support these work plans’ goals of improving the accountability and transparency mechanisms in place within the FLA and assuring fair compensation for workers, and I’m looking forward to stewarding the advancement of these plans.

At this meeting, the Board of Directors will be discussing the Accountability and Transparency Work Plan, as developed by FLA staff since the October Board meeting, with input from all stakeholder groups via webinars, solicitation of written feedback from affiliates, and targeted outreach. This work plan is organized into action steps to be taken over the next two years, with some steps beginning this year, such as the reaccreditation pilot project and our work to ensure that all tier-one facilities are included in the scope of FLA affiliation. With this work plan, we will build toward a more effective FLA that commits to greater accountability to affiliates, while also strengthening our public reputation for accountability and transparency on our work with companies.

Also, I’m pleased to report on the progress of the Fair Compensation team, which last month provided company affiliates with our new global compensation data-collection template – a tool that FLA assessors piloted and refined during our 2015 factory assessment cycle. Later this spring, we will share results with our affiliates. Subsequently, we will produce our first public reporting on compensation levels, and as company affiliates begin piloting collection of their own compensation data, we'll move forward with data aggregation. The goal is to help introduce uniform calculation of compensation across factories and sourcing countries, ultimately to identify high-risk areas in supply chains, and to support progress on fair compensation for workers worldwide.

The new FLA project with the US Marine Corps introduces another opportunity for the FLA staff and Board to examine an existing program and enhance its potential. Starting in January, the Marine Corps has begun requiring its licensees to join the FLA Licensee Program, bringing around 300 new companies into the FLA. With this project, the FLA has the opportunity to consider how introducing new categories of licensees might affect our current programs, and how we can make those programs more efficient, effective, and impactful. If we can find a successful model, it might be possible to bring in other US Government agencies that are interested in improving the social responsibility profile of their licensees.

3. OUTWARD-FACING INITIATIVES
I’d like to end with a celebration of a very important development for the FLA, which I had the good fortune to announce to affiliates during my first week on the job. The new cooperative agreement with the US Department of Labor secured $4.87 million in funding for an FLA-led project to pilot test US Department of Agriculture guidelines for eliminating child and forced labor in agriculture. This new source of funding is a highly encouraging vote of confidence and support for the FLA, and provides an opportunity to assess how we might broaden our access to financial resources.

Other FLA Research and Innovation projects have secured external funding from governments and foundations in the past, and consistent with the goal outlined in the strategic plan, we will be more intentional about assessing how this funding model might form a bigger part of our future.

Finally, as I think we may all know, the FLA’s previous strategic plan was written with the year 2017 as its furthest point on the horizon. A lot has happened within the FLA since this strategic plan was written in 2012, and it’s a testament to the resilience and commitment of the staff, the guidance of the Board, and the relevance of the FLA’s mission that the organization continues to innovate, evolve, and improve. As we make progress together in 2016, we’ll look forward to refreshing the organization’s strategic plan for 2017 and beyond.

The work of the FLA continues, with 2016 poised to build on the work of 2015 to strengthen the core programs -- and develop new initiatives -- in ways that respond to the evolving realities of the global economy, always with the goal of protecting workers across supply chains.