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Ms. Linda Kromjong

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Dear Linda,

With reference to your letter of 31 July 2017 I am surprised that the IOE, committed to human rights and freedom of association for business, would knowingly participate in a conference held in a State where not only workers are subject to the most serious state-sponsored human and labour rights violations, but equally business owners and managers are at risk of having their property and commercial operations seized with no recourse.

While we have been disappointed at the lack of support from business concerning the violence and oppression levelled against workers including the dismissal and incarceration by emergency decree of more than 125,000 public servants, academics, teachers and journalists without recourse to justice, it astounds us that there is no public solidarity from any business source for the people at the head of the more than the 950 companies affected. Some \$11 billion worth of corporate assets have been taken over by the government, a systematic seizure with few precedents in modern economic history. Thousands of business people and managers have fled overseas to cities as far-flung as Nashville and Helsinki.

Freedom of association has been stripped away both for workers and for business. We have documented the arrests and imprisonment of union members taking part in protests, speaking out on social media or campaigning against the anti-democratic measures inherent in the recent referendum. Indeed thousands of dismissals, house raids on union leaders and even armed attacks on union leaders represent everyday risks for trade unionists. We will continue to stand in solidarity and demand return to the rule of law and we offer similar solidarity for your business members.

You are aware that the 2017 Committee on the Application of Standards, discussed a complaint regarding the application of Convention 135 on Worker Representation, expressed concern over the allegations in relation to the dismissal and arrest of workers' representatives following the proclamation of the state of emergency, and clearly found that there is no freedom of speech for worker representatives, let alone freedom to exercise their trade union representative functions (see pages 190 – 198 of this year's report of the CAS).

Since then the Chair of Amnesty International Turkey was arrested and for some days held in isolation along with other NGO leaders, and a UN judge has been convicted with a seven year sentence, in breach of diplomatic immunity and a binding legal order.

More recently the Turkish Government showed its contempt for business by listing more than 600 German companies as supporters of terrorism, and while they later withdrew the list these actions must raise deep concern for both foreign and domestic businesses.

It is only with the full respect of freedom of association and freedom of expression without victimization that Turkish trade unions would be able to speak freely before, during or after the Regional Meeting and indeed the same would apply for business leaders. The ITUC certainly won't put our leaders in any position that would legitimise the current actions of the Turkish Government or to risk reprisals against local Turkish representatives when we leave. We are surprised that the IOE would be prepared to do so. It is not the security risk during the conference but the potential for reprisals following it that is most worrying. At this moment, more and more leading Turkish figures are seeking refuge out of the country.

We have said repeatedly that should the situation change in the country with a return to the rule of law with democratic rights and freedoms, real justice for workers arbitrarily dismissed or arrested, and an end to the continuous and coordinated attacks on trade unions and workers' rights, then we would of course review this decision. However, we see no evidence of such, rather daily accounts of escalating totalitarianism, and numerous governments have cited the state of emergency and restrictions on civil liberties in travel advice and warnings to their own citizens.

I am sorry that we don't have a joint position on these egregious violations for both business and workers, and we in the ITUC and our colleagues in the ETUC believe that European labour ministries should also reconsider legitimating such actions by their presence. We set out with the Turkish Labour Minister some clear options for returning to the rule of law, but these measures have not been taken up.

In turn, I would request that the IOE again consider its own participation. While we stand in support of both workers and employers it is clear to us that the political conditions in Turkey would not allow for the holding of an ILO Regional Conference where social dialogue could resolve the issues at stake.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. B...', written in a cursive style.

General Secretary