

CAMPAIGN TO RATIFY ALL CORE ILO CONVENTIONS

March 30, 2009

The Honourable Rona Ambrose, PC, MP
Minister of Labour
Human Resources Development Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0J2

Dear Minister Ambrose:

We are writing you on behalf of our four organizations, the 340,000-member National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE), the 240,000-member United Food and Commercial Workers Canada (UFCW), the 200,000-member Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) and the 60,000-member Canadian Police Association (CPA). Together, we represent some 840,000 Canadian workers and their families.

Our four organizations have worked closely together over the past four years to promote a greater recognition of labour rights as human rights both here in Canada and internationally.

This letter is written to register our concern that Canada has failed to ratify the three core Conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) governing forced labour, the minimum age for working and the right to collective bargaining. The specific core ILO Conventions we are referring to are:

- Convention No. 29 – Forced Labour, 1930;
- Convention No. 98 – Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining, 1949; and
- Convention No. 138 – Minimum Age, 1973.

We encourage you on behalf of your government to take positive measures aimed at having Canada ratify these three core ILO Conventions within the not-too-distant future.

These three Conventions, along with the other five core ILO Conventions that Canada has ratified, are recognized around the world as fundamental labour rights that should be respected by all member States of the ILO. The ILO and its member States (including Canada) have identified these core Conventions as the basis on which all other workers' rights can be built in that they provide for the necessary conditions for the improvement of individual and collective rights at work.



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It is our view that the failure of previous Canadian governments to ratify all eight core ILO Conventions has been a source of international embarrassment for our country as it puts us close to the bottom of countries in the world which have not formally recognized the fundamental rights of human beings at work.

An overwhelming number of ILO member States around the world have ratified all eight core Conventions (126 out of 182 countries). Canada is one of only nine countries that have not ratified Convention No. 29 – Forced Labour (1930). We are one of only 29 countries which have not ratified Convention No. 98 – Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining (1949) and one of only 51 countries that have not ratified Convention No. 138 – Minimum Age (1973).

Ironically, Canada was an active participant in drafting ILO's 1998 *Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work* which commits all ILO member States, whether or not they have ratified the core Conventions, to respect the labour principles covered by the core Conventions. The federal government also voted in favour of adopting the *Declaration* and agreed "to respect, to promote and to realize in good faith" the rights and principles of the eight core Conventions.

We encourage you and your Department to take immediate measures to work with your provincial and territorial counterparts to develop a concrete plan and timetable for Canada's ratification of the three remaining core ILO Conventions.

Minister Ambrose, we also encourage you to use this opportunity to change the practice of previous governments with respect to the ratification of ILO Conventions by opening the process to greater transparency and Parliamentary debate.

In recent years, federal government consultations regarding ratification of ILO Conventions have not encompassed the ILO's spirit of social dialogue and tripartism. They have been limited to discussions between federal, provincial and territorial governments and have not involved the labour movement, one of Canada's tripartite partners in matters dealing with the ILO. Successive governments have failed to outline reasons to the labour movement for Canada's refusal to ratify the remaining three core ILO Conventions. We ask you to encourage your government to better promote and adhere to the well-respected principle of tripartism to the same level the federal government has historically done with respect to adopting ILO Conventions at the ILO annual conferences in Geneva.

Minister Ambrose, on behalf of our four organizations, we commit to work with you and your Department to help ensure that Canada plays a more significant role in promoting

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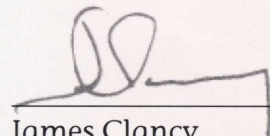
the fundamental rights of human beings at work as exemplified in the eight core ILO Conventions.

At a time when the core ILO Conventions are becoming increasingly important and recognized as fundamental human rights at work, it is critical that Canada catch up with most other countries around the world and commit to ratifying all eight core Conventions.

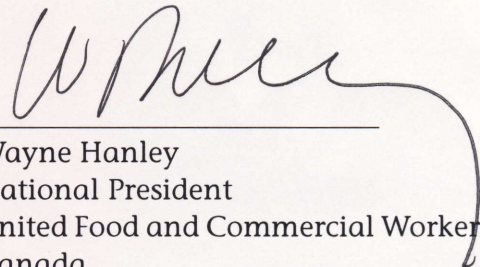
We recognize that Canada's federated structure means that the federal government must engage its provincial and territorial counterparts in matters concerning the ILO. We do not accept, however, that our federated structure is an excuse for the federal government not to act when it comes to having Canada recognize, promote and adhere to fundamental human rights.

We would welcome an opportunity to have a small delegation of the leadership of our four organizations meet with you and your officials in the near future to discuss the matters we have raised in this letter. We have designated Derek Fudge, NUPGE's National Director of Policy Development, to be the contact person for our four organizations on this portfolio. Your officials can reach Mr. Fudge by phone at 613-228-9800 or by e-mail at dfudge@nupge.ca.

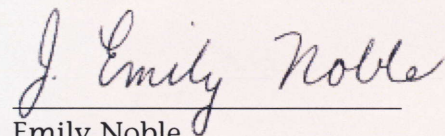
Sincerely yours,



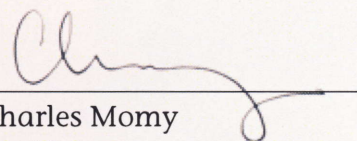
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National Union of Public and General
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