

Mr David Oddsson,
Prime Minister
Stjornarradshusid
150 Reykjavik
Iceland
Via Fax No.:+354 562 4014

DC/SE/ckr

17 December 2001

Dear Prime Minister,

Iceland Air Traffic Control

It is with great regret that I find myself having to write for the second time this year drawing attention to action by the Iceland government which is a clear violation of the fundamental right to freedom of association as defined in the Conventions of the ILO. We are currently preparing a formal complaint to the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association regarding your intervention in the legitimate strike by Icelandic fishermen. We have now been informed by the Icelandic trade union of air traffic controllers that your government has threatened to intervene to deny them the basic right to strike.

While such attacks on fundamental rights are often encountered in countries with little in the way of democratic traditions, we find this approach extraordinary in Iceland, a country which has the world's oldest parliament. The ITF is, of course, very sensitive to the need to guarantee safety in the aviation industry, particularly in the light of the events of 11 September and we represent hundreds of thousands of aviation workers worldwide, many of whom depend for their lives on effective aviation safety. Nevertheless, this cannot be used as a reason to deprive aviation workers, including air traffic controllers, of their basic rights.

We have been informed by the trade union concerned, the Felag Islenskra Flugumferdarstjora, ICEATCA, that government representatives have threatened to withdraw the right to strike for all controllers, and have demanded that they also sign away the right to bargain collectively.

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The issue of provision of minimum services by air traffic controllers is clearly one of importance. We have been informed that Icelandic courts concluded in 1998 that the majority of Icelandic controllers should have the right to strike.

Air traffic controllers in Iceland are concerned that the government is not implementing recommendations from a Committee of Enquiry in 1997. The recommendations made in that report are sensible, and supported by the Ministries of Transportation, Foreign Affairs and Finance as well as the Civil Aviation Authority. We are also deeply dismayed at threats to withdraw the right to strike, which would undermine the ability of controllers to bargain collectively over their working conditions. Such action would be a clear breach of Iceland's obligations under Conventions 87 and 98 of the ILO and the ITF will not hesitate in referring this matter also to the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association.

If there is one lesson that we hope that governments will have learnt in these recent tragic months for aviation, it is the need to harness the energy and commitment of aviation employees, to treat the workers in the industry as safety and security professionals and to see them as resources rather than as risks in the effort to rebuild a strong industry. We hope that your government will recognise that a partnership between employers and workers is now more important than ever, and that we can all move forward to meet the challenges ahead. Implementing the 1997 report recommendations, and unequivocally withdrawing any threats to the right to strike and to demands to sign away the right to bargain collectively, would be positive testimony to our ability to work together.

Yours sincerely,

David Cockroft,
General Secretary

cc ICTEATCA, ETUC