September 2, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20451

Subject: Immediately Restore, & Continue, U.S. Funding for, and U.S. Participation in, the International Labor Organization (ILO)

Dear Secretary Rubio,

On behalf of American business, agriculture, industry, and retail, and the tens of millions of American workers we employ, we are writing to urge the administration to immediately restore, and continue, U.S. funding for, and U.S. participation in, the International Labor Organization (ILO).

Our members and industries rely on the essential work of the ILO, whose purpose is to work globally to ensure a level playing field for all workers, including American workers. In fact, the ILO's work, because of U.S. participation and influence, puts America first by reflecting the values of the American people as it furthers the interest of American workers and American businesses.

The ILO builds institutions in countries around the world so that they can effectively implement and enforce internationally recognized labor standards, standards the U.S. created and upholds in its own laws. Further, the ILO's core international labor standards focus heavily on combatting forced labor, which is an administration priority as demonstrated by the recent Section 301 actions on forced labor and the Trump administration's vigorous enforcement of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA) and the U.S. Forced Labor Statute (Section 1307).

The ILO provides training to foreign workers so they know their rights, and how to defend them. The ILO maintains staff and offices in dozens of key countries that provide real time intelligence, contacts, and solutions to promote and protect internationally recognized labor standards. And finally, the ILO's Better Work program establishes strong labor enforcement and transparency in key countries around the world.

Through this important work, the ILO not only reflects American values, but the ILO also ensures that foreign workers, and the foreign companies that employ them, don't have an unfair competitive advantage over American workers and American businesses. That is why the Trump administration acknowledges the institution's importance, and the ILO's internationally recognized core labor standards by requiring countries to uphold those standards in virtually all of the administration's recent Agreements on Reciprocal Trade (ARTs) (*See Examples "Agreement Between the United States of America and the Kingdom of Cambodia on Reciprocal Trade" (Article 2.8), "Agreement Between the United States of America and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan on Reciprocal Trade" (Article 2.9 and Annex 3, Article 1.13*). Without U.S. leadership in, and funding for, the ILO, these labor protections we expect other countries to abide by and uphold will be weakened.

The ILO's partnership with U.S. business helps protect and promote internationally recognized labor standards, including combatting forced labor, in every country from which we source, which in turn provides a stable business environment for American businesses, protects the tens of millions of American workers we employ, and levels the playing field for American manufacturers, American farmers, and American workers.

A U.S. withdrawal from the ILO would cede control of and leadership at the ILO to countries that do not share American values or the ILO's fundamental principles and rights at work. Instead, these countries could use the ILO to tilt the playing field against American businesses and American workers, weakening the ILO's focus on combatting forced labor and undermining the U.S.-built ILO core international labor standards. Further, if the U.S. government withdraws membership, U.S. business will also lose its voting rights at the International Labor Conference (ILC), which will have adverse consequences for U.S. business' global influence and competitiveness.

While we recognize that there is a pressing need for deep reforms at the ILO to establish more responsible management, we believe that the costs of U.S. withdrawal at this time would far outweigh the benefits. Therefore, we again urge the administration to put America first by immediately restoring, and continuing, U.S. funding for, and participation, in the ILO.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter. Please contact Nate Herman at nherman@aafaglobal.org if you have any questions or would like additional information.

Sincerely,
American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA)
Fair Labor Association (FLA)
Global Seafood Alliance
National Fisheries Institute (NFI)
National Foreign Trade Council (NFTC)
National Retail Federation (NRF)
Retail Industry Leaders Association (RILA)
U.S. Chamber of Commerce
U.S. Council for International Business (USCIB)
U.S. Fashion Industry Association (USFIA)

CC:
The Honorable Keith Sonderling, Acting Secretary, U.S. Department of Labor
The Honorable Jamieson Greer, U.S. Trade Representative, Office of the U.S. Trade Representative
House Appropriations Committee
House Education and Workforce Committee
House Foreign Affairs Committee
House Ways & Means Committee
Senate Appropriations Committee
Senate Finance Committee
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions