

Letter in Support of a Standard-Setting Item on Gender-Based Violence in the Workplace

To:

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We, the undersigned organizations, write to urge the United States Council for International Business to support the proposal for a standard setting item on “violence against women and men in the world of work” at the November 2014 Governing Body Session of the International Labor Organization.

Gender-based violence in the workplace is a pernicious and widespread problem. Worldwide, 35 percent of women experience violence, and between 40 and 50 percent of women experience unwanted sexual advances, physical contact or other forms of sexual harassment at work. This has profoundly negative effects on victims’ health and well-being, and imposes high costs on employers and society at large.

Harassment, stalking behavior, threats and abuse – all part of what constitutes gender-based violence at work – are known to hamper job performance and productivity, and can prevent individuals from engaging in the labor force at all. The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate gender-based violence costs the US economy \$5.8 billion a year in direct medical and mental health expenditures and lost productivity. In countries that lack the relatively robust protections the United States has for its citizens, that number is much higher.

A tripartite global standard would provide clear and comprehensive guidance on how to protect workers and employers from the negative impacts of widespread gender-based violence, including sexual harassment. The nature of gender-based violence at work requires common

protections against the full range of coercive and damaging behaviors, in addition to any legal protections that exist for abuses such as assault and rape.

Without strong laws and developed government mechanisms, employers not only suffer losses through reduced productivity and absenteeism, they may individually bear the cost of developing programs to ensure the safety of their workers and reduce the risk of legal liability or negative publicity. Ensuring governments assume responsibility for addressing and remediating gender-based violence will protect both victims and employers. A global standard will facilitate compliance in international operations by developing common frameworks and definitions.

An international standard to create safe and productive working environments is in the best interest of businesses operating within the United States and throughout the world. We urge the United States Council for International Business to join the United States government in supporting this worthy measure.

Sincerely,

The Advocates for Human Rights

American Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations

American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees

Association for Women's Rights in Development

Blue Star Strategies

Center for Health and Gender Equity

Center for Women's Global Leadership, Rutgers University

Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice

Coalition of Immokalee Workers

The Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking

Feminist Majority Foundation

Futures Without Violence

Gender at Work

Human Rights Watch

International Labor Rights Forum

International Brotherhood of Teamsters

Just Associates

National Nurses United

National Organization for Women Foundation

National Women's Law Center

Office and Professional Employees International Union Local 2

Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union

The Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights

Service Employees International Union

Solidarity Center

Unite Here

United Food and Commercial Workers

United Steelworkers

Vital Voices Global Partnership

Women Thrive Worldwide

Workers United