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國際運輸勞連

International Transport Workers' Federation
Federación Internacional de los Trabajadores del Transporte
Fédération internationale des ouvriers du transport
Internationella Transportarbetarefederationen
Internationale Transportarbeiter-Föderation
Международная федерация транспортников
التنظيم عالمياً، النضال من أجل حقوقنا

Mr Pedro Heilbron
Executive President Copa
E. S. M.

Via email: pheilbron@copair.com

Our ref: OGS/SMC/ED/sv
15 May 2020

Dear Mr Heilbron

On behalf of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), which affiliates nearly 20 million transport workers, from nearly 700 affiliates in 150 countries worldwide; we express our concern regarding the restructuring process of COPA Airlines during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our affiliates in Panama have informed us that COPA intends to make a drastic reduction in the workforce, salaries and working hours (up to 50%), without the consensus of the workers unions. On top of that, the company has ceased dialogue with the unions, and wants to suspend workers contracts without considering legal processes related to trade union rights.

It is important to highlight that during the initial phase of the pandemic the Tocumen S.A. International Airport remained operational thanks to the workers who exposed themselves to possible contagions that could affect their health. It seems unfair that past and future efforts are not taken into account when making drastic decisions that affect the families of the workers.

Unfortunately, this behaviour is not being reported only in Panama, but in the COPA Holding. Our affiliates in Colombia, for example, informed us that around 37 workers were suspended and/or dismissed without justification despite the unions having agreed to a series of reductions in wages and benefits to mitigate the impact of the crisis.

As a global federation, we are not unaware of the difficult reality that civil aviation is going through in the world and we understand the tremendous challenges that companies face, however, we consider that the only way out of this crisis and the only hope of recovery will be with the effort and commitment of the workers. In this sense, unions cannot be excluded from a real dialogue table, without impositions, and neither can their leaders be discriminated; nor workers suffer actions that do not comply with the law.

The Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205) emphasizes, in particular, the importance of social dialogue in responding to crisis situations and the vital role of employers' and workers' organizations in crisis response. Particularly, the Recommendation underlines the key role of consultation and encouraging active participation of employers' and workers' organizations in planning, implementing and monitoring measures for recovery and resilience. It calls on ILO member States to recognize the vital role of employers' and workers' organizations in crisis response, taking into account ILO Conventions 87 and 98.

Social dialogue at the level of the enterprise is critical, as workers need to be kept informed, consulted and kept aware both as regards the impact on their own terms and conditions of employment and as to the steps they can take for their own protection and to contribute to containment.

This situation becomes even more striking when we look at the official earnings document for the first quarter of COPA HOLDINGS, where a net profit of 74 million dollars is reported. That document concludes stating that “The Company has a very solid business model, which is based on operating the best and most convenient network for intra-Latin America travel from its Hub of the Americas based in Panama’s advantageous geographic position, with the region’s lowest unit costs, best on-time performance, and strongest balance sheet. Going forward, the Company believes that its Hub of the Americas will be an even more valuable source of strategic advantage, especially if fewer intra Latin America markets are able to sustain direct point to point service. We believe our hub will be the best positioned to serve these markets. The company expects to leverage its strong balance sheet, leading liquidity position and lower cost base to continue strengthening its long-term competitive position and to implement initiatives to further strengthen its network and product in the post Covid-19 world”.

Nevertheless, the civil aviation workers unions affiliated to the ITF, have expressed their commitment to negotiating and reaching consensus, as well as the will to work together so that the Company resumes operations when the quarantine and isolation periods ends.

I look forward to your positive response on these urgent and important matters in order to achieve a proper and effective dialogue with the unions and avoid any escalating conflict.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen" followed by a stylized flourish.

Stephen Cotton
General Secretary