



Department for Business & Trade

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10 January 2024

Dear Iain,

Thank you for your comments during the Trade (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) Bill Committee Stage on 14 December in which you shared concerns around the agreement enforcing the International Labour Organisation (ILO) standards and CPTPP member countries' adherence to the ILO fundamental conventions.

All CPTPP parties are ILO members. The Labour Chapter reaffirms CPTPP Parties' obligations as members of the ILO. Noting that CPTPP was drafted prior to the 2022 amendment to the ILO Declaration, Article 19.3 of the CPTPP's Labour Chapter includes binding provisions on the fundamental labour rights in the 1998 ILO Declaration, which are the subject of the then 8 ILO Fundamental Conventions. Although 'a safe and healthy working environment' had not yet been added to the ILO Declaration as a fundamental right, Article 19.3 does have binding provisions on occupational safety and health which captures the subject of the two conventions added in 2022. The UK is strongly committed to the ILO Fundamental Conventions and HMG is making continued and sustained efforts to ratify the remaining convention covering occupational health and safety.

CPTPP prevents parties from waiving, derogating from and failing to enforce their labour laws in a manner affecting trade or investment, ensuring CPTPP parties cannot gain a competitive advantage in trade by poorly enforcing or deviating from their labour laws. The Labour Chapter is also subject to a dispute resolution mechanism so the agreement provides robust means to ensure parties can be held to account when they fail to uphold their commitments made in the Chapter.

Trade does not have to come at the expense of labour standards. Accession to CPTPP will mean that the UK will be part of an expanding agreement, helping to reinforce the rules-based international system and advocate for internationally recognised labour standards throughout the Indo-Pacific region. Provisions in the Labour Chapter provide a framework for parties to work together to improve labour standards and to further advance common commitments regarding labour matters. In addition to having mechanisms to allow member countries to work together on these important issues, the Chapter also provides a comprehensive list of collaboration activities between parties to improve labour standards, including research and development related to best practices and exchanges of technical expertise and assistance.

Recent efforts by CPTPP countries to improve their labour standards include concerted efforts by the Malaysian Government to tackle forced labour, following high-profile cases during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, Malaysia renewed its National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons for a third five-year term and launched a National Action Plan on Forced Labour. In July 2023, Brunei announced its first minimum wage. The UK is also collaborating with Vietnam to tackle modern slavery, forced labour and human trafficking. We have supported programmes to train over 600 police officers and border guards, prosecutors, and judges in techniques to investigate human trafficking. These are a few examples of how positive action on labour rights has been taken in CPTPP countries.

The Government is actively engaging with Civil Society and Trade Union groups to inform our considerations for accession and are keen to work together to enable the UK to demonstrate its leadership across these different areas and advance UK trade and sustainable development objectives.

I am placing a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

With very best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Johnson', with a horizontal line underneath.

Lord Johnson of Lainston CBE
Minister for Investment and Regulatory Reform
Department for Business and Trade