



A powerful
and balanced
voice for business



IOE-ITUC Statement on the ISO AFNOR proposal May 2020

Employers and Workers were among the founding constituents of the International Labour Organization (ILO) more than 100 years ago, committing to the values of social justice and decent work. Our commitment to fundamental principles and rights at work, the ILO Social Justice Declaration, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and other instruments for responsible business conduct and human rights remains firm and guides our work.

Both organisations, representing tens of millions of companies and hundreds of millions of workers, oppose the proposal to create corporate social responsibility standards by a new ISO Technical Committee.

Firstly, there is the danger that this proposed Technical Committee would undermine and create divergence of universally accepted and carefully negotiated standards on human and labour issues. Existing standards on human and labour rights have been developed by Governments in consultation with stakeholders, including trade unions and employers, over a number of years and continue to be developed in areas where there are gaps.

Secondly, there is real concern that this proposal would result in the privatisation of social standards. The competence and responsibility for standard setting on human and labour rights, including responsible business conduct, at the international level lies within the ILO and the UN. Authoritative international standards and guidelines – including the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, ILO Conventions, the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy, and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises – have been carefully developed, in multi-stakeholder processes, and the guidance tools are publicly available at no cost. Whereas ISO standards are subject to copyright protections and must be purchased.

Thirdly, from an organisational perspective, while ISO convenes small expert groups to address discrete technical issues, its model and membership is not appropriate for addressing larger social issues, including human rights, which require truly representative processes.

ITUC and IOE therefore urge ISO and its member standardisation bodies to decline creating a new Technical Committee on Social Responsibility. We would ask that you inform ISO members around the world that this is our commonly held position.
