November 5, 2019.

Subject: Strike Action at CN

The Honourable Patricia A. Hajdu
Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour
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The Honourable Marc Garneau
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The Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau
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The Honourable Amarjeet Sohi
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The Honourable Bill Morneau
Minister of Finance
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cc Chief of Staff Ryan.Dunn@canada.ca

Dear Ministers,

We are writing to you today to provide input on the impending strike notice by CN Teamsters Canada Rail Conference (TCRC), and to strongly urge the Government of Canada to take any necessary action to keep the railroads operating should the current labour negotiations prove unsuccessful.

The Canadian International Freight Forwarders Association (CIFFA) represents some 260 regular member firms from the largest of global multinational freight forwarding firms to small and medium sized Canadian companies. CIFFA member companies employ tens of thousands of highly skilled international trade and transportation specialists. As a vital component of Canada’s global supply chain, CIFFA member companies facilitate the movement of goods around the world.
Our activities have direct impact on the Canadian consumer.

As you will be aware, CN is currently in negotiations with the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference, which has disclosed that its 3,000 members voted 99.2 percent October 28 in favour of a strike. A strike could begin at 12:01 a.m. on Nov. 19, after the union provides at least 72 hours' notice.

CN has told CIFFA members it is optimistic that the company and union will reach a mutually satisfactory collective agreement without a labour disruption, which is the desired outcome.

CIFFA respects the negotiation process, and believes that a negotiated settlement is the best way to proceed. However, in the event of a strike situation we call for swift legislative action in order to keep Canada’s economy moving.

Halting the movement of goods in Canada even for a short period of time will have serious implications for the entire supply chain. Any rail stoppage would create delays negatively impacting Canadian exporters and importers along with their overseas customers who depend on reliable transportation flows. Canadian manufacturers and consumers would be negatively impacted from uncertainty and delays to delivery of manufacturing inputs and imported consumer goods. It has long been our position that Canada’s railroads should be deemed essential services.

It could take months to recover from a rail stoppage at CN, critically impacting the process of getting product to markets here and abroad at a time when the Canadian economy cannot afford any degree of volatility.

On behalf of our members and their thousands of customers, should the negotiations fail and a strike is called, we urge the Government of Canada to take immediate action to ensure that Canada’s cargo continues to move. Canadians must have certainty in their supply chains, and in the labour forces on the country’s railroads.

Ministers, we look forward to your continued leadership in this area and to a swift and decisive conclusion to these matters.

Sincerely, CIFFA
Canadian International Freight Forwarders Association (CIFFA)

Bruce Rodgers Executive Director
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*Freight Forwarders – Helping Canadians Do Business with the World*