

Coalition to Make Whistleblowing Safe During COVID-19 and Beyond

The signatories to this letter **call on all public authorities and institutions to protect those who report or expose the harms, abuses and serious wrongdoing that arise during this period of crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.** We also encourage all citizens and workers to participate in ensuring our governments, corporate institutions and markets remain accountable, and in defending the human rights and freedoms of all people.

The COVID-19 pandemic brings into stark relief the importance of accountability and the need for regular and reliable information from our public institutions and our leaders. The people of every affected country need to know the truth about the spread of the disease both locally and internationally in order to respond effectively and help protect their communities. Fairness, transparency and cooperation are vital and never more so than during a pandemic.

We have already seen examples of wrongdoing and mismanagement in our public institutions, commercial markets and business as a result of COVID-19. Emerging areas of concern include health system capacity and delivery, public procurement, violations of health and safety and labor law, inequitable and ill-prepared global supply chains, unfair competition practices and market abuses, and significant violations of personal privacy rights at scale through the digital tracking of individuals.

Proper notification of risk to the public and to workers, fair and responsible conduct by all institutions, and transparent data collection are all critical to public confidence in our ability to overcome this crisis. This is even more important when the protections normally provided by the fundamental democratic pillars of our societies are curtailed or side-stepped. Parliaments and democratic assemblies are being suspended in many countries. The use of extraordinary powers by governments without proper public oversight and transparency creates a tangible risk of overreach and potential misuse.

When decisions are taken in emergency conditions, often away from democratic scrutiny, **whistleblowers can play a vital early warning role.** They are the corrective fail-safe mechanism in any society, especially in an international health crisis when the public's right to know can have life-or-death implications. In this time of crisis and beyond, **we encourage citizens and workers to participate in ensuring that proper accountability is maintained in our governments, corporate institutions and markets,** and in defending the human rights and freedoms of all people.

During this pandemic we have already witnessed abuses. At various times, the fundamental rights of freedom of expression and access to information have been restricted. The cost of these actions is most severely borne by the most vulnerable members of our communities: the elderly, the poor, immigrants and refugees, LGBTQ communities, prisoners, the multitudes of precarious workers as well as frontline workers in the crisis.

Whistleblowing has proven to be a powerful tool to fight and prevent actions that undermine the public interest. **Our organizations call on all public authorities and corporate institutions to protect those who expose harms, abuses and serious wrongdoing during the COVID-19 crisis, and beyond.** Workers are taking risks daily to maintain the many essential services which we rely upon, especially in these times, our health services, care for elderly care and other social and public services, as well as food supply and logistics, just to name a few. The importance of these workers, their right to a safe working environment and to speak up about threats to public health and safety, corruption, and other abuses must be recognized and protected. Their disclosures, as well as those from all citizens, are vital to preventing major disasters and reducing the impacts of the crisis on us all, especially on the most vulnerable members of society and our democratic systems.