



1 February 2020

Scott Morrison
Prime Minister

By email: scott.morrison.mp@aph.gov.au

SUSPENSION OF FLIGHTS TO CHINA AND PROTECTIONS FOR AIRPORT WORKERS

Dear Prime Minister

Yesterday the TWU called on the Federal Government to immediately suspend all incoming flights from China to Australia in order to prevent the further spread of the coronavirus. We note that today the US has begun banning entry for people travelling from China, that the Queensland Government has today also echoed the call for a ban on flights from China, and that Qantas has announced suspension of some China flights.

Our decision to call for suspension yesterday was not taken lightly. However, following extensive consultation with our rank-and-file membership and elected leadership of the union we came to this view based on, among other considerations:

- The declaration of an emergency of international concern by the World Health Organisation for only the sixth time in history;
- The fact that the coronavirus has already spread to at least 21 countries including Australia;
- As at time of writing around 10,000 cases have been confirmed worldwide with tragically over 250 deaths;
- Every part of China now has cases of the coronavirus;
- Person to person spread of the coronavirus has now been confirmed;
- Air travel is the most efficient means to spread the virus;
- Australia is in a unique position as an island nation to have the capacity to suspend air travel and thus greatly minimise the risk of further spread;
- The advice regarding the coronavirus continues to change as more information is known, for instance the fact that earlier this week medical advice was that it was unlikely to spread unless a person was showing symptoms to the advice being updated a day later that the virus could spread before symptoms became apparent;
- Other major airlines, such as British Airways, have suspended flights; and
- Russia has closed its border with China and Hong Kong has been effectively isolated from China.

Most importantly our members across the aviation industry, which includes cabin crew, fleet presentation, ground crew, guest services, catering, transport and security among others, are at the frontline dealing with passengers every day.

On behalf of these workers across the aviation industry, we are urging that the Government immediately suspend all incoming flights from China other than any flights bringing stranded Australians home.

Dealing with the Serious Risk to the Health and Safety of Workers

It is critical that all aviation companies employing workers on the frontline of the outbreak respects the decision of any worker who believes that servicing an inbound plane from China poses a serious risk to their health and safety (and in this case that of their family and friends) and as such elects to immediately

cease work. This right extends to any worker who has a known or reasonable concern that a person carrying the coronavirus was on board any plane.

The TWU will stand by the decision of any worker who elects to make this eminently reasonable decision. Should any action be taken against any worker who elects to exercise this right we will vigorously defend them.

We ask that the Government reminds companies operating at the airport of the rights of workers to cease unsafe work and to support workers who are forced to make this difficult decision.

We have been made aware of extremely disturbing directions that have been issued to workers at airports this week, including to workers threatened with disciplinary action for refusing unsafe work and to workers choosing to wear protective masks.

While we are working closely with airlines and aviation companies regarding the precautions and protections for workers, we are encountering particularly difficulties eliciting information from Swissport on the steps they have taken to inform and support workers who serviced the Tigerair flight this week which was confirmed to have carried a passenger infected with the virus. Swissport has been at the centre of various wage underpayment and health & safety scandals, with the company exposed over an enterprise agreement in place for over seven years which pays below the award, workers forced to sleep at the airports and high rates of workplace injuries. Given the low standards at Swissport we are concerned that they are not adequately protecting their workforce and are thereby risking public health.

Airport workers are seriously concerned at the outbreak and how they can protect themselves and their families. It is not helpful at this time that they are being issued with threats and kept confused about the risks they are exposed to.

Advice regarding the coronavirus continues to evolve.

A short time ago it was unclear whether person to person contact spread the virus. This has now been confirmed. Initial advice was that only a person with active symptoms could spread the virus. It has now been confirmed that a person without symptoms can spread the virus.

Under these circumstances, we ask that the Federal Government supports airport workers on the frontline and ensures an end the threats against workers exercising their rights.

We also ask that the Federal Government instructs airports and airlines at the top of the industry to have robust policies and procedures in place and, most importantly, that they ensure all subcontracting companies in their supply chains are following these policies and procedures.

The Government should urgently issue to all Aviation companies and Airports the *specific measures* that should be taken in relation to at least the following subject matters:

- Advising workers about the virus, how it is transmitted, what precautions they need to take and how they can minimise infection;
- Protective gear and equipment;
- The rights of airport workers to wear personal protective equipment as desired – including rubber gloves and facemasks;
- The rights of airport workers to take adequate breaks to take the time required to take all necessary precautions to protect themselves from exposure;
- Robust contingency plans for when a suspected or confirmed case of infection at an airport or on an airline is detected particularly in respect of how workers are informed and potentially isolated;

- Guarantees that any workers being isolated continue to be paid;
- Training for airport workers on dealing with potential exposure to the virus;
- Making available support services to workers if they have any concerns.

Summary

In finishing, we are asking that the Federal Government to:

- Cease all inbound flights to China immediately
- Support airport workers and their right to refuse unsafe work
- Instruct airports and airlines to put in place robust procedures and to ensure that all subcontracting companies are also following them

I look forward to your response as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely



Michael Kaine
TWU National Secretary

CC: Minister for Home Affairs, Peter Dutton
Minister for Transport, Michael McCormack
Minister for Industrial Relations, Christian Porter