

Civil Society Statement – UK Engagement on a UN Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights

Ten years on from the introduction of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), voluntary initiatives have failed to have a meaningful impact on tackling abuse in business operations and supply chains. This includes modern slavery, unsafe working conditions, attacks on human rights defenders including trade unions, pollution of land and water, and other abuses which disproportionately impact poor and marginalised communities globally. Because of the nature of global business – including their size, power and operations which cross multiple jurisdictions – tackling this problem requires national and international action.

A UN Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights, under negotiation at the Human Rights Council (UNHRC) since 2014, would not only prevent future human rights violations and environmental destruction and improve access to justice for people affected, but would also level the playing field and provide legal certainty for companies. The [latest draft text](#) includes provisions for “*mandatory human rights due diligence*” and access to remedy, and recognises “*the contribution and complementary role*” of the UNGPs. A 2022 report of the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) recommends that, “*all States engage constructively in the process*”.

Notably, in 2022 G7 leaders committed to “*maximise the coherent implementation of and compliance with international standards relating to human rights, environment, and labour across global supply chains,*” including to introduce “*mandatory measures that protect rights-holders*”. Other States, including G7 countries, are not only showing support for this vital agenda but are also preparing or tabling [complementary new laws](#) which go far beyond the UK’s existing supply chain legislation, the Section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and Schedule 17 of the Environment Act 2021.

At the 2021 UN Treaty negotiations, the UK stated that “*the draft appears to insufficiently cover the full spectrum of businesses that can impact human rights*” and that “*the UK remains sceptical that this text can gather the political support that it would need to succeed in our shared goals of enhancing respect for human rights by businesses globally, and ensuring access to effective remedy for all victims.*” As UK civil society organisations, we look forward to working with the Government towards a strengthened UN Treaty and encourage the UK to introduce [complementary UK legislation](#) that tackles social and environmental harm across all business actors, with effective enforcement and remedy for rights-holders.

We call on the UK Government to:

- 1. Attend and constructively engage in the negotiations in Geneva, 24-28 October 2022.**
- 2. Engage with civil society organisations and rights-holders who will be impacted by a UN Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights, ahead of, during and following the negotiations.**
- 3. Support the process and to strengthen the text through positive and constructive statements.**