

Second Reading of Baroness Young of Hornsey's Commercial Organisations and Public Authorities Duty (Human Rights and Environment) Bill in the House of Lords on 10 May 2024

Serious human rights abuses and environmental harms are still present in UK supply chains. The UK must urgently introduce a new law requiring all businesses and the public sector to prevent, address and remedy any harm to human rights, including labour rights, and the environment in their global value chains.¹

The Bill would:

- 1) **Enhance corporate accountability and ensure access to justice for rightsholders:** Place a duty on commercial organisations and public authorities to prevent human rights abuses and environmental harms, including a requirement to conduct human rights and environmental due diligence on their own operations, subsidiaries and value chains. It would hold commercial organisations accountable for their failure to prevent such harm by making provisions for civil liability, penalties, and a criminal offence for failure to comply with the duty and improve access to justice in the UK for victims of corporate abuse by UK companies.
- 2) **Level the playing field for business:** Provide clarity and certainty on legal obligations and level the playing field for business by bringing them all up to the same standard of practice.
- 3) **Align with international standards:** Ensure the UK adheres to its commitment to implement internationally recognised standards, including the [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#), the [OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises](#) and the [ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work](#).

Existing support:

- A [pledge](#) in support of a new UK law on business, human rights and the environment to protect people and the planet from abuse was signed by 55 MPs and Peers from eight different parties.
- A new law is called for by over 150 [businesses and investors](#), UK [civil society organisations](#), trade unions, and more than [120,000 people](#) in the UK who have signed a petition. YouGov [polling](#) shows four in five adults in the UK support new laws requiring UK companies to prevent human rights abuses and serious environmental damage in their operations or supply chains.
- The Bill is modelled on the world-leading 'failure to prevent' model of the 2010 Bribery Act – as already [recommended](#) by Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights and [identified](#) as legally feasible by the British Institute of International and Comparative Law.

The UK is falling behind:

- A new law would help the UK to keep pace with similar legal developments [internationally](#) and in the [EU](#), including [France](#), [Germany](#) and [Norway](#), and remain competitive as a centre for excellence in regulation and corporate governance, which is key to its attractiveness as an investment destination.
- Because of their narrow respective focus, neither the UK Modern Slavery Act [Section 54](#), which still excludes the public sector, nor the Environment Act's [Schedule 17](#), reach the internationally accepted standards on addressing human rights and environmental harms in global value chains – nor do they introduce sufficient requirements to adequately address [forced labour](#) or [deforestation](#) respectively.

We urge you to speak in favour of the Private Members Bill at the second reading. We would be pleased to have the opportunity to share additional materials and speak to you on topics that you would be interested in raising.

For more information, please contact evie.clarke@cjcoalition.org.

¹ For further information on the need for a new 'Business, Human Rights and Environment Act', please see a [general Parliamentary briefing](#) and a [briefing on the environment and achieving a just transition in global value chains](#).