Civil society groups call on the UK Government to shape a progressive engagement strategy at this critical juncture in the UN Binding Treaty on Human Rights process

12 October 2026: The undersigned 10 civil society organisations call on the UK Government to put human and environmental rights at the centre of a new engagement strategy, as part of the 12th UN open-ended intergovernmental working group (OEIGWG) negotiation session for a legally binding treaty on transnational corporations and human rights (commonly known as the UN binding treaty), taking place during the week commencing 12 October.

To date, the Labour government has not changed the UK's approach to these Treaty negotiations from that of their Conservative predecessors, despite the welcome commitment to strengthen the UK's approach to Responsible Business Conduct as laid out in the 2025 Trade Strategy. At this critical juncture, the Government of Prime Minister Andy Burnham has the opportunity to determine a new means of engagement, and to support a strong, gender-responsive treaty which helps prevent human rights and environmental violations before they occur, holds corporations accountable for the impact of their activities, and provides effective access to remedy for victims, affected persons and communities.

The UN Binding Treaty process is entering a crucial phase: in 2027, the Ecuadorian Chair intends for a revised and updated draft text to be produced that could form the basis of a submission to the Human Rights Council. Consequently, the 12th Session of negotiations reflects a critical window for the next phase of development of this multilateral human rights initiative which holds the promise of binding global standards and duties to regulate corporate behaviour throughout value chains. Now is the time for the UK to substantively engage, showing leadership on human rights and supporting longstanding efforts to prevent harm resulting from business activities.

It is essential that the power imbalances which exist between the Global North and South are not reproduced during this process. Similarly, the treaty text must consider the systemic inequalities and specific challenges faced by workers, women and marginalised groups and communities, including Indigenous peoples and other customary rights holders.

Support for mandatory and internationally accepted rules to prevent human rights violations and environmental damage, to create a level playing field for responsible business and to hold corporations to account are supported by the British public, trade unions and responsible UK businesses. The UK Government has demonstrated its willingness to assess and address shortcomings on responsible business conduct and the UK's implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and in 2025 commissioned two reviews accordingly. We call on the Government to extend this demonstrable interest in business and human rights to the UN Binding Treaty Process.

In parallel, the UK also urgently needs to reform its national legislation to ensure that companies registered or operating within the UK take effective action to prevent serious human rights violations or environmental damage linked to their activities, and are held to account if they fail to do so. To this end, we encourage the Government to publish its reports into Responsible Business Conduct and the National Baseline Assessment.

The UN Binding Treaty forms an important part of the solution – as does the urgent adoption of a Business, Human Rights and Environment Act at national level.

Our specific recommendations for the next round of negotiations include:

- The Treaty should mandate transnational corporations to respect human and environmental rights; legally enforceable standards are needed to influence corporate conduct and create a level playing field. It should cover a broad range of human rights, including the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.
- The Treaty should ensure victims and affected communities can access justice (with a gender and intersectional approach), including robust remedies, burden-shifting mechanisms, and the elimination of legal barriers like *forum non conveniens*. Victims and affected communities deserve meaningful avenues to justice — not a patchwork of exceptions. Legal consistency is key to accountability.
- The Treaty should also hold all companies to account for violations throughout the whole value chain, and reject automatic immunity through due diligence compliance. Transnational crimes require transnational accountability; it is vital to ensure that corporations cannot outsource harm and escape liability.
- The Treaty should ensure the protection of individuals and communities facing heightened and differentiated risks throughout the instrument.
- The Treaty text must include clear protections against corporate capture of national decision-making spaces.

We call on the UK Government to:

1. **Adopt a rights-holder and victim-centred approach, and constructively support a strong Treaty that ends corporate impunity, particularly in transnational settings, and enables effective access to justice.**
2. **Engage with civil society organisations, trade unions, affected communities and rights-holders, particularly women, indigenous peoples and other historically marginalised groups, ahead of, during and following the negotiation.**
3. **Actively avoid reproducing existing power imbalances and hierarchies between the Global North and Global South.**
4. **Introduce national legislation to implement and complement international standards – ensuring UK businesses prevent human rights violations and environmental harm in their operations and value chains and victims and affected communities have access to justice.**
5. **Publish the research commissioned in 2025 on the potential ramifications of a UN treaty on business and human rights for the global business environment, as well as the National Baseline Assessment, and the Responsible Business Conduct Review**

Signatories

- ABColombia
- ActionAid
- CAFOD
- Corporate Justice Coalition
- Earthsight
- Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF)
- Friends of the Earth (England, Wales, Northern Ireland)
- THIRST
- Trócaire
- War on Want