



# A Call to Action towards the 11<sup>th</sup> session of the Intergovernmental Working Group on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights

## **To governments negotiating a legally binding instrument on business and human rights**

As faith leaders, entrusted with the care of our communities and creation, we witness with deep concern the growing harm caused by irresponsible business practices, often in the absence of effective and enforceable regulations to safeguard human rights and the environment. This harm wounds both people and the Earth, with the most vulnerable among us — children, young people, and women — often bearing the brunt of both economic injustice and ecological harm.

In this context, we urge States to protect human rights and the environment by agreeing on an international legally binding instrument on business and human rights. Our commitment to justice and the dignity of every human being is rooted in the sacredness of all people created in the image of God<sup>i</sup>. This image will give all human beings in their diversity the inherent worth and rights that must not be violated or commodified by any system, economic or political.

The situation of many communities around the world is worsening due to inadequate regulation of business practices and a concerning disregard for the impacts of environmental degradation, including climate change, on human rights and the ecosystems on which thriving and resilient livelihoods depend. Histories of colonisation and exploitation, theft of land and resources from Indigenous peoples by powerful economic groups, and disregard for local cultures, needs, and interests cannot be allowed to continue. We must honour rights and restore dignity and self-determination of those impacted.

The devastating human toll of disasters such as the recent pollution of Zambia's main watershed as a result of copper mining;<sup>ii</sup> the 2019 Brumadinho dam collapse in Brazil;<sup>iii</sup> the 2013 Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh;<sup>iv</sup> and the 2006 toxic waste dumping in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire<sup>v</sup> illustrate how corporate abuses and impunity extend throughout value chains. These disasters disproportionately affect women working in exploitative labour conditions, youth employed informally and unsafely, and children exposed to environmental toxins, further entrenching cycles of injustice.

In parallel, new and less visible forms of corporate harm are rapidly emerging. The widespread use of artificial intelligence (AI), surveillance technologies, and data extraction tools by corporations — often deployed without oversight or consent, pose major human rights risks contributing to further structural discrimination and privacy violations further disempowering those in the margins. These issues highlight the inadequacy of national laws and voluntary international frameworks such as the UN Guiding Principles<sup>vi</sup> in preventing human rights abuses in the contexts of business operations.<sup>vii</sup>

In 2014, the Human Rights Council initiated the process towards an international legally binding instrument<sup>viii</sup>. At that time, Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, then Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations in Geneva, emphasised:

*“The responsibility to respect human rights stems from the recognition that businesses have a social function that cannot be reduced only to the production and distribution of goods and services. As important actors within a globalised world they bear a responsibility to abide by, and to promote human rights in their own domain of activity. While the Guiding Principles can improve the integration*

*of the priority of the human person and the environment in international economic activity, only a binding instrument will be more effective in advancing this objective”.*<sup>ix</sup>

Eleven years have passed since then. Progress has been slow, but the process has recently gained momentum. Now is the time to act. We believe it is a moral imperative that nations come together to adopt a binding international agreement, one that ensures the dignity of every person, the protection of creation and the accountability of those who harm others for profit. A binding international legal instrument would ensure that States can regulate and hold businesses to account, especially given their growing power and wealth, and ensure that their operations and activities, including those under the rubric of 'development' do not come at the expense of human rights.

The call to a legally binding instrument on business and human rights is not simply a legal or political demand, but a spiritual imperative grounded in the prophetic tradition that commands us to "seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow",<sup>x</sup> and today, to amplify the voices of youth and protect the rights of girls and women affected by extractivism, exploitation, and displacement. It is a call to ensure the dignity of every person, including young people and future generations whose wellbeing depends on just and sustainable systems. Spiritual restoration, far from being an intimate individual act, is a call to a profound restoration of our belonging and ties to our community, to the earth, and to life. The Earth itself is a sacred trust from God, and we are called to be stewards, not exploiters, of creation.<sup>xi</sup> When corporate actions lead to environmental destruction, communities lose not just livelihoods but also futures - children lose access to safe water, air, and traditional knowledge systems that ground them in dignity and hope, and the ability to live in harmony with creation — a relationship many faiths regard as holy.

Ensuring that human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled is the legal and moral obligation of States, but in the face of growing corporate power and influence<sup>xii</sup> international cooperation is key. The measures needed to fulfil this duty rest with States both individually and collectively. An international legally binding instrument on business and human rights is the best way forward.

In October 2025, the Intergovernmental Working Group mandated to negotiate the legally binding instrument will meet for its 11th session. Reaching consensus on substantive and methodological issues will be critical. We urge States to constructively engage with the treaty process and support the delivery of meaningful outcomes including to:

1. Ensure the primacy of human rights over all other considerations - too many businesses put profits over people and the planet.<sup>xiii</sup>
2. Adopt a robust approach to the State obligation to prevent human rights abuses involving businesses, including by guaranteeing rights of access to information, participation, consultation and by legislating for mandatory and rigorous human rights and environmental due diligence encompassing a company's entire corporate structure and value chains.
3. Oblige States to recognise and protect the rights and legitimacy of human rights defenders<sup>xiv</sup> by adopting and disclosing policies to protect them from attacks, assassination, extrajudicial killings, violence, harassment, strategic litigation against public participation, and repression; and provide effective reparation.
4. End corporate impunity and ensure gender responsive access to justice across all territorial jurisdictions, especially for the marginalised individuals and communities facing intersecting forms of discrimination, including Indigenous women, girls, youth, and those whose rights are routinely overlooked in corporate-dominated spaces.

The upcoming 11th session represents one more step on a journey towards a binding treaty that States must then sign, ratify and implement. We commit to accompanying this process with our voices, prayers, and actions. May this treaty reflect the values of compassion, accountability, and shared humanity. For the sake of all life and for the rights of women today and the dignity of children tomorrow, we call on all who hold power to act with courage, wisdom, and justice.

July 2025

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<sup>i</sup> Genesis 1:27

<sup>ii</sup> [Zambia: Four foreign mining companies accused of polluting the country's main watershed, sparking public outrage - Business & Human Rights Resource Centre](#)

<sup>iii</sup> [Five years after Brumadinho: New research unveils hidden risks in tailings dams - International Water Power](#)

<sup>iv</sup> Clean Clothes Campaign, Rana Plaza, <https://cleanclothes.org/campaigns/past/rana-plaza>; Encyclopaedia Britannica, Fast Fashion, <https://www.britannica.com/art/fast-fashion>

<sup>v</sup> The African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, *Ligue Ivoirienne des Droits de L'homme (Lidho) and others v. Republic of Côte d'Ivoire*, 5 September 2023, [64febdf77f811512395983.pdf](#)

<sup>vi</sup> [guidingprinciplesbusinesshr\\_en.pdf](#)

<sup>vii</sup> Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Business needs human rights and human rights need business*, statement delivered on 16 December 2024 at the 10th session of the open-ended intergovernmental working group on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2024/12/business-needs-human-rights-and-human-rights-need-business> See also Christian Aid, *Getting Down to Business: putting human rights at the heart of a just and equitable energy transition*, October 2023, <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-10/getting-down-to-business-report-final.pdf> FIDH, *UN binding treaty on business and human rights: FIDH's preliminary comments*, 16 October 2023.

<sup>viii</sup> [Resolution 26/9](#)

<sup>ix</sup> [International Businesses and the Protection of Human Rights | EWTN](#)

<sup>x</sup> Isaiah 1:17

<sup>xi</sup> Psalm 24:1; Romans 8:22

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xiii</sup> Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Business needs human rights and human rights need business*.

<sup>xiv</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/53/144, 9 December 1998, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/53/144>

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