Programme

As at: 09 November 2017

sef: Policy Lunch
Is the window of opportunity still open?
State of the negotiations on a UN Treaty
on Business and Human Rights

Brussels
Representation of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia to the EU
Rue Montoyer 47, Brussels

20 November 2017, 12.00 - 13.45 hrs

Conference language: English

Cooperating Partner
CIDSE - International Alliance of Catholic Development Agencies, Brussels

Supported by
Minister for Federal, European and International Affairs of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia

#sefLunch
BACKGROUND

In October 2017, a working group commissioned by the United Nations Human Rights Council is meeting to negotiate possible elements of a legally-binding treaty on business and human rights. For the first time, there seems to be a window of opportunity to go beyond voluntary means as established by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. It might be possible to increase the accountability of businesses for the protection of human rights. In addition, a binding UN Treaty could also provide the prospect of enhancing the access to effective remedy for victims of business-related human rights violations.

The scope of a potential treaty is still to be defined. In the run-up to this third session of the working group, diverging views on the need and extend of such a treaty were discussed. Up to now, the “soft-law” approach seems to have limited success. Weak transparency in supply chains of internationally operating companies and complaints about human rights violations and damages to the environment by these companies continue. On the other hand, concerns have been raised that a UN Treaty may undermine the voluntary commitments made in the past years.

Initially, the European Union had also been one of the critics of the negotiations, while the European Parliament has been a supporter of negotiating a binding treaty. At the same time, a number of European countries (France, Great Britain and the Netherlands) have already progressed on adopting binding laws for parts of business action (requiring “vigilance plans” and banning child labour and slavery for example).

Following the October negotiations, we would like to shed a light on the content of the discussions. What kinds of elements are likely to be included in a UN Treaty? How can victims of human rights violations gain better access to remedy? What is the position of the European Union on the results of the October meeting? What are the practical implications of a legally-binding treaty for countries and businesses?
12.00 HRS  REGISTRATION AND LIGHT LUNCH

12.30 HRS  WELCOME

Rainer Steffens  
Director, Representation of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia to the EU, Brussels  

Michèle Roth  
Executive Director  
Development and Peace Foundation (sef), Bonn

12.40 HRS  ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Denise Auclair  
Senior Advisor  
CIDSE - International Alliance of Catholic Development Agencies, Brussels  

Mercedes García Pérez  
Head of the Human Rights Division  
EU External Action Service, Brussels  

Lola Sánchez Caldentey MEP  
Member of the Development Committee  
European Parliament, Brussels

Chair  

Patrick Leusch  
Head European Affairs  
Deutsche Welle, Bonn

Followed by discussion with the audience

13.45 HRS  END OF EVENT