

# : 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



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## 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 extent 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?

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**12.00 HRS**

**REGISTRATION AND LIGHT LUNCH**

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**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

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**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

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**13.45 HRS**

**END OF EVENT**