

The logo for act:onaid, featuring the word "act:onaid" in a bold, red, sans-serif font.The logo for Clean Clothes Campaign, with the words "Clean Clothes Campaign" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. A small red scissors icon is positioned at the bottom right of the text.

NGOs welcome MEP initiative on responsible business conduct

Joint statement

Brussels, 19 March 2019

Today the cross-party European Parliament Working Group on Responsible Business Conduct (RBC Group) [1] announced a bold **Shadow EU Action Plan on Responsible Business Conduct** outlining the necessary steps to ensuring a globally responsible and accountable European business sector.

The undersigning NGOs highly welcome the MEPs' initiative to react to EU inertia in progressing the agenda on responsible business conduct and sustainable global supply chains. A 2011 commitment from the European Commission to develop an Action Plan on responsible business conduct has been left unfulfilled for almost a decade and is likely to lapse yet again with the outgoing Commission. Meanwhile, the evidence of the link between European companies and human rights and environmental abuses worldwide continues to grow, with almost half of all major EU companies subject to documented accusations of human rights violations [2].

A coalition of ActionAid, Amnesty International, Anti-Slavery International, Clean Clothes Campaign, the European Coalition for Corporate Justice and FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights) therefore urge the European Commission to follow suit and take immediate steps towards the development of the overdue action plan. The ambitious and comprehensive Shadow EU Action Plan presented today by MEPs should serve as a strong basis for EU action that must now make up for lost time.

The NGOs invite all candidates running for the European elections to publicly support the Shadow EU Action Plan and to commit to taking leadership around the implementation of measures to ensure responsible business conduct if elected [3].

Background

The Shadow EU Action Plan is an initiative from within the European Parliament, notably the Responsible Business Conduct Working Group. The Plan acknowledges the EU's particular responsibility - as the largest economic market globally - to take on a leadership role in advancing corporate accountability and human rights due diligence. The Plan proposes a list

of measures the European Commission should take in the immediate future to establish the basic structure and framework to require and enable business to act responsibly and to facilitate access to remedy for victims of human rights abuse.

The Plan further reflects on the EU's role in global trade, economic diplomacy and economic promotion; calls for better support for human rights defenders; and incorporates a gender lens in the proposed measures, reflecting the recognition that business activities often impact women in a disproportionate and differentiated way.

The Plan also calls for the EU to constructively engage in the process towards the establishment of a legally binding instrument on business and human rights at the United Nations. This is a timely call given recent rumours that the EU may withdraw from the ongoing process altogether, leading to much consternation among civil society advocating for a strong EU role in this process [4].

The signatories:

ActionAid International
Amnesty International
Anti-Slavery International
Clean Clothes Campaign
European Coalition for Corporate Justice (ECCJ)
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

[1] European Parliament Working Group on Responsible Business Conduct, more info at <https://responsiblebusinessconduct.eu/>

[2] <http://ipisresearch.be/publication/adverse-human-rights-risks-impacts-european-companies-getting-glimpse-picture-2/>

[3] Pledge on Business and Human Rights:
<https://responsiblebusinessconduct.eu/wp/2019/03/16/pledge-on-business-and-human-rights/>

[4] <http://www.foeeurope.org/leak-eu-un-treaty-human-rights-130319>