

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Ligue Internationale de Femmes pour la Paix et la Liberté

Liga Internacional de Mujeres por la Paz y la Libertad

Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC, UNCTAD and UNESCO; Special Consultative Relations with FAO, ILO, and UNICEF



First session of the open-ended intergovernmental working group on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights

Statement by Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom joins the statement read on behalf of the Treaty Alliance and would like to further develop some points.

We welcome the initiative to create a binding international instrument on corporations with respect to human rights.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Past experiences in human rights treaties and other international instruments taught us that many times we have brought women in the conversation too late. Today, significant effort is required to read human rights treaties that were drafted without a significant participation of women so that they will be fully useful for affected women.

For instance, we struggle today to prove that domestic violence or rape equates to torture because women were not fully included in the negotiation process of Human Rights Treaties that enshrine the freedom from torture, such as the Convention Against Torture.

There is no doubt that we have the opportunity ahead of us this time to include affected women from the beginning of the process, bearing in mind that women are not a homogenous group.

Madam Chair, let me encourage you to take leadership as a woman in ensuring the voices of affected women are heard, from civil society and from States. WILPF deeply believes it would be important to see women present in all panels this week.

GENDER APPROACH

However, women participation does not replace gender expertise. We believe a gender perspective will be needed throughout the process, particularly in discussions on which human rights should be enforced, standards for legal liability and access to justice mechanisms. In these topics, having the voices of women will not be enough, we will need to have a gender analysis of the particular ways in which corporations may affect the rights of women and on how our response should be adapted to their needs.

We regret there is no specific panel on women and gender and we hope this can be the case in the second session.

CORPORATIONS AND CONFLICT

Also, special attention should be given to linkages between corporations' activities and armed conflicts.

Corporations may violate human rights in contexts of instability or armed conflict. In such contexts, corporations may benefit from an increased militarization of society that can repress protests against human rights violations or repress demands of due consultation of the people affected by corporate projects. Companies can also benefit from conflict when such conflicts cause internal displacement, thus facilitating land-grabbing schemes.

For instance, in Buenaventura, Colombia, the conflict between criminal armed groups and paramilitary as well as the general insecurity have caused internal displacement. This has eventually benefited transnational companies projects that have been planned to transform ancestral lands into commercial and touristic harbours.

BINDING NATURE OF THE INSTRUMENT

WILPF does not underestimate the value of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and we encourage all member states to promptly adopt Action Plans to implement those. However, an international binding treaty is desperately needed as Human Rights cannot be an option but are an obligation.

For this reason, we refuse to make a business case to convince corporations on the benefits to respect human rights. We believe that respect of human rights and contributions to wider society have a positive impact in the profit of companies and for their consumers. Having to convince corporations about the financial benefits of human rights compliance would mean putting profit before people.

With a binding legal instrument we no longer would have to convince companies of the "value" of complying with human rights, we could demand compliance.

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