

2013 United Nations Forum on Business and Human Rights

Suggestion for panel: The role and protection of human rights defenders working on issues of corporate accountability

10 August 2013

Dear Forum Secretariat

Further to our email of 26 March 2013, thank you for the invitation to submit suggestions on potential topics or panels for the 2013 United Nations Forum on Business and Human Rights.

The International Service for Human Rights would like to suggest that the Forum convene a panel or discussion on the protection of human rights defenders working on issues of corporate accountability.

Human rights defenders and civil society organisations have an important and legitimate role in raising awareness of the human rights impacts and risks of business. Meaningful consultation and engagement between human rights defenders, corporations and States can play a critical role in identifying, preventing, mitigating and ensuring accountability for the adverse human rights impacts of business.¹

Despite this, around the world there are increasing cases of human rights defenders who work on issues of corporate accountability – whether in relation to labour rights, land rights, Indigenous rights or otherwise – themselves being subject to attacks, threats, intimidation and harassment, including judicial harassment.² There are also increasing cases of human rights defenders being subject to restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and protest, despite the Guiding Principles calling on all actors to ensure ‘that the legitimate and peaceful activities of human rights defenders are not obstructed’.

A panel discussion could consider, further elucidate and provide guidance as to the role and protection of human rights defenders, including as an aspect of each of the state responsibility to protect, the corporate responsibility to respect, and the right of access to an effective remedy.

¹ See further <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatches/globalpost-blogs/commentary/bangladesh-tragedy-human-rights-corporate-accountability>.

² See further <http://www.ishr.ch/general-news/1558-un-must-address-brutal-attacks-on-human-rights-defenders-who-work-on-issues-of-corporate-accountability>.

A panel discussion would also be timely given the Human Rights Council being increasingly called upon to consider the role and protection of human rights defenders working on issues of corporate accountability.³

In terms of potential speakers on this topic, we would suggest the inclusion of a range of civil society representatives and human rights defenders who work on corporate accountability issues, including people such as:

- Hassan Shire Sheikh of the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project
- Mary Lawlor of Frontline Defenders
- Gerald Staberock of OMCT
- Arvind Ganesan or Christopher Albin-Lackey of Human Rights Watch

The International Service for Human Rights would also be pleased to participate in any panel or discussion.

We would be happy to discuss this suggestion with you further.

Yours sincerely

Philip Lynch
Director

E: p.lynch@ishr.ch

³ See, eg, <http://www.ishr.ch/council/428-council-not-in-feed/1516-council-called-upon-to-take-action-on-human-rights-defenders-and-corporate-accountability->.