

Press release

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UK Parliament's Human Rights Committee calls for new laws to stop company human rights abuse

- **CORE welcomes call from Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights for laws to prevent child labour and other abuses linked to British companies.**

Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights, chaired by Harriet Harman MP has called on the UK government to bring forward legislation to impose a duty on companies to prevent human rights abuses, in a [new report](#) on Human Rights & Business published today.

The Committee recommends that the UK government makes reporting on human rights due diligence compulsory for all large businesses, with a monitoring and enforcement procedure.

An offence of 'failure to prevent human rights abuses' should also be introduced for all companies, including parent companies, following the model of the Bribery Act 2010. It would be up to the company to demonstrate that it had taken the necessary steps to comply with the law.

CORE gave evidence to the inquiry in July 2016. Welcoming the report, CORE's Director Marilyn Croser said: "The bosses of Sports Direct and BHS were hauled in front of MPs, but when corporate irresponsibility happens somewhere else, it's out of sight, out of mind. Some British companies are operating with total disregard for workers' rights and local communities in some of the poorest countries in the world. We commend the JCHR for shining a light onto these practices and urge the government to implement the Committee's recommendations."

The Committee also recommends:

- That companies which have not undertaken appropriate and effective human rights due diligence be excluded from all public sector contracts.
- The government publish a list of companies covered by the Transparency in Supply Chains reporting requirement in the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

- UK-owned companies should be obliged to recognise trade union membership as a condition of contracts with suppliers.
- The UK National Contact Point complaint mechanism should be better resourced and should have an independent steering board.
- Human rights protections must be a central pillar of future trade deals.

The Committee welcomes the government's 'genuine leadership' on the issue of modern slavery and notes that the UK was the first country to publish a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, but it criticises the government's 'weak' and 'complacent' approach on access to remedy for victims of corporate abuse.

"If the Prime Minister is serious about getting tough on irresponsible behaviour in big business, then she must take action to crack down on corporate human rights abuse. The Ministry of Justice is currently considering whether the criminal law regime is a barrier to prosecuting companies for financial crime. This exercise must now be broadened out to look at liability for serious human rights abuses", said Marilyn Croser.

ENDS.

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CORE is the UK NGO coalition on corporate accountability. For more information see www.corporate-responsibility.org

The Joint Committee on Human Rights announced its inquiry into business and human rights in June 2016.