



10th April 2019

We are civil society organisations who want companies to be more accountable. Today, we are launching a new campaign calling for an effective law to require companies and investors to take action to prevent human rights abuses, worker exploitation and environmental harm in their global operations, activities, products, services, investments and supply chains.

We want to ensure that British companies and financial institutions meet their responsibility to respect rights everywhere in the world. Some businesses already do so. But too many others are linked to serious abuses: exploitative working conditions, including modern slavery and child labour; toxic pollution; rampant destruction of rainforests; land-grabs and evictions of indigenous peoples and local communities; and violent attacks on human rights defenders.

The people who suffer are often the most vulnerable and marginalised. Children can be disproportionately impacted by corporate activity. Women, including as workers and women organising to protect their communities from harmful corporate activities, also face particular risk of human rights abuses.

Despite more attention being paid to these issues in recent years, there are still no laws in the UK specifically requiring companies to take action to prevent and rectify human rights abuses and environmental damage.

Too many companies are doing nothing to identify and address the impacts that they have on human rights and the environment. Instead, they seek to profit by undercutting more responsible operators who are trying to raise standards. Meanwhile, British consumers are at risk of buying products tainted by horrific abuses and environmental devastation.

It's time to change this.

What we're calling for and how it would make a difference

Due diligence is a concept familiar to all companies. We want companies to be required to carry out *human rights and environmental due diligence* – that is, to identify, assess and mitigate the risks to all human rights and the environment posed by their activities.

Mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence is one measure that has huge potential to change the way business operates around the world. If the company fails to act and abuses go unchecked, it could be held to account in court.

A new law would increase protection for individuals and communities, workers, human rights defenders, and the environment. It would create clarity and a level playing field for companies. It would give consumers the confidence that human rights abuses and environmental damage aren't part of the price tag for products. And it would enhance the UK's reputation as a leader in promoting responsible business conduct.

Around the world, policy makers, business leaders, academics and campaigners are coming together to work for legislative change to end irresponsible corporate practices. At the UN, an intergovernmental working group is developing a new international legally binding agreement to regulate the activities of multinational companies and other businesses in international human rights law. And across Europe, there is now a growing trend towards introducing human rights and environmental due diligence laws. It's vital that the UK doesn't fall behind and become a safe haven for irresponsible business.