

Media Release – For immediate use

The EU must Walk the Talk on Corporate Accountability Initiatives

Brussels, 16 November 2009

Following last week’s Swedish Presidency announcement that it is looking to operationalise the Protect, Respect and Remedy framework¹ on corporate accountability, workers from developing countries and representatives from the EU, NGOs and business will gather at a seminar in the European Parliament to debate what steps the EU needs to put in place to ensure that European businesses are made accountable for human and labour rights abuses in their supply chains.

Workers in the global food and clothing supply chains face some of the most exploitative conditions of work and yet companies are making higher and higher profits. The half-day seminar taking place on the morning of the 17th November will hear testimonies from grass-roots workers and their representatives about conditions on the ground, case studies from Southern NGOs of their experiences of dealing with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and ideas from experts about how to take the EU’s role in advancing corporate accountability forward.

“We are interested in seeing whether the Spanish Presidency will actually walk the talk and operationalise the suggestions in Professor Ruggie’s report. The conclusions that came out of last week’s meeting on CSR were encouraging, but we hope to see the Spanish Presidency come up with a concrete plan for how to implement the steps”, commented Conny Reuter, Secretary General of SOLIDAR.

Astrid Valencia from Grupo de Monitoreo Independiente de El Salvador commented: “From what we see in El Salvador, the only way that the EU can make a difference is by putting in place fully fledged regulations for European businesses; any half baked voluntary measures will simply not work. Additionally, we need people further up in the organisation’s structure to be held accountable, and we would like to see ‘Directors Duties’ whereby the Director is made personally responsible if there are workers abuses further down the chain to be enacted.”

“Many clothing workers work in Export Processing Zones, where industrial action is often forbidden, where working hours are long and health and safety conditions dangerous. Others work in agricultural supply chains, earning below-minimum wages and with no social protection in the case of illness or unemployment. John Ruggie’s report sets out a fully integrated regulatory framework that ensures those responsible can’t wriggle out of their duty. Now it

is just up to the EU to set the process going by providing a roadmap for how we go from voluntarism to accountability”, concluded Simon McRae from War on Want.

WHAT?

Whose Responsibility? Decent Work and Multinational Supply Chains: A half day seminar exploring the business of labour rights.

WHEN?

17 November 2009, 9 am – 1 pm

WHERE?

European Parliament Brussels, Altiero Spinelli building, Room A3H1

NOTES

¹ 2008 UN Human Rights Council's Report 'Protect, Respect, and Remedy: a framework for business and human rights', developed by John Ruggie the UN Rapporteur on Business and Human Rights seeks to ensure that companies respect and are held responsible for human rights' violations in their supply chains

- [Seminar Agenda](#)
- [Invitation](#)
- Demands to MEPs (attached)
- [Background papers](#)

ENDS

Contact: Abigail Goundry, SOLIDAR Communications Officer

00 32 472 607 449 or abigail.goundry@solidar.org

SOLIDAR is a European network of 53 NGOs active in over 90 countries working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide. SOLIDAR lobbies the EU and international institutions in three primary areas: social affairs (more social Europe), international cooperation (development cooperation) and education (lifelong learning for all). For more info www.solidar.org