

: Programme

As at: 09 November 2017

sef: Policy Lunch **Is the window of opportunity still open?** **State of the negotiations on a UN Treaty** **on Business and Human Rights**

Brussels

Representation of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia to the EU
Rue Montoyer 47, Brussels

20 November 2017, 12.00 - 13.45 hrs

Conference language: English

Cooperating Partner

CIDSE - International Alliance of Catholic Development Agencies, Brussels



Supported by

Minister for Federal, European
and International Affairs
of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia



BACKGROUND

In October 2017, a working group commissioned by the United Nations Human Rights Council is meeting to negotiate possible elements of a legally-binding treaty on business and human rights. For the first time, there seems to be a window of opportunity to go beyond voluntary means as established by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. It might be possible to increase the accountability of businesses for the protection of human rights. In addition, a binding UN Treaty could also provide the prospect of enhancing the access to effective remedy for victims of business-related human rights violations.

The scope of a potential treaty is still to be defined. In the run-up to this third session of the working group, diverging views on the need and extend of such a treaty were discussed. Up to now, the “soft-law” approach seems to have limited success. Weak transparency in supply chains of internationally operating companies and complaints about human rights violations and damages to the environment by these companies continue. On the other hand, concerns have been raised that a UN Treaty may undermine the voluntary commitments made in the past years.

Initially, the European Union had also been one of the critics of the negotiations, while the European Parliament has been a supporter of negotiating a binding treaty. At the same time, a number of European countries (France, Great Britain and the Netherlands) have already progressed on adopting binding laws for parts of business action (requiring “vigilance plans” and banning child labour and slavery for example).

Following the October negotiations, we would like to shed a light on the content of the discussions. What kinds of elements are likely to be included in a UN Treaty? How can victims of human rights violations gain better access to remedy? What is the position of the European Union on the results of the October meeting? What are the practical implications of a legally-binding treaty for countries and businesses?

12.00 HRS

REGISTRATION AND LIGHT LUNCH

12.30 HRS

WELCOME

Rainer Steffens

Director, Representation of the State of
North Rhine-Westphalia to the EU, Brussels

Michèle Roth

Executive Director
Development and Peace Foundation (sef:), Bonn

12.40 HRS

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

Denise Auclair

Senior Advisor
CIDSE - International Alliance of Catholic Development
Agencies, Brussels

Mercedes García Pérez

Head of the Human Rights Division
EU External Action Service, Brussels

Lola Sánchez Caldentey MEP

Member of the Development Committee
European Parliament, Brussels

Chair

Patrick Leusch

Head European Affairs
Deutsche Welle, Bonn

Followed by discussion with the audience

13.45 HRS

END OF EVENT