



**Friends of
the Earth
Europe**

for the people | for the planet | for the future

26 November 2018, Brussels

Dear Vice-President Timmermans,

We write to you as a coalition of European CSOs advocating for a UN binding treaty on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights. We would like to request a meeting with you to discuss international legally binding measures to ensure that companies involved in human rights violations can be held accountable and that victims of corporate abuses have access to justice.

We were very pleased to hear you say, at a recent conference on sustainable global value chains, that voluntary instruments such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD guidelines might not be sufficient to ensure businesses act responsibly. We agree with your statement during that event that “we shouldn’t overestimate the possibilities of so called non-binding agreements” and that binding regulation is needed.

This is also reflected in the Commission’s paper on Harnessing Globalisation - for which you wrote the foreword - that states that “when companies do not take their social or environmental responsibilities seriously, they should be held to account”.

We believe the EU should play a leading role in establishing regional and international binding instruments. At the international level, the proposed UN treaty can act as a powerful instrument to stop corporate human rights violations and bring justice to individuals and communities that are victims of corporate abuses like land grabbing, unsafe working conditions or environmental pollution. In October 2016, we presented a petition in support of the UN treaty, signed by 90,000 citizens from all over Europe, to your head of Cabinet, Mr. Smulders.

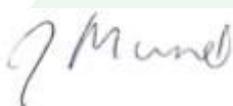
As vice-president of the European Commission you have shown clear leadership on protecting fundamental and human rights, for instance in relation to recent initiatives of the Polish government that could undermine the rule of law. We also welcome your statements on the need for enforceable regulation to protect human rights. We hope that with your ambition as ‘Spitzenkandidat’, you will strengthen this leadership role.

A European Union that works to protect people’s rights and the public interest, rather than disproportionately protects corporate profits and private interests, will be an important issue for citizens in the EU elections.

We are aware that you and your team are working on a Reflection Paper on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will pave the way for the next Commission to take action on the implementation of the SDGs, including on issues related to global value chains and the development and mainstreaming of corporate human rights due diligence across the business community, as suggested by the High Level Multi-stakeholder Platform on the SDGs.

In the above context we would like to meet with you, preferably in December or January, to explore ways to advance this agenda on binding regulation for business and human rights in Europe and internationally in the next months, and in view of the political dynamics during 2019, including the European Parliament elections.

Yours sincerely,



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