

Statement at 23rd Session of the UN Human Rights Council

30 May 2013

Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with Working Group on Human Rights and Transnational Corporations and other Business Enterprises

STATES AND BUSINESS MUST RESPECT AND SUPPORT THE WORK OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS WORKING ON ISSUES OF CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr President,

The International Service for Human Rights welcomes the report of the Working Group on human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises.

In March, this Council adopted an historic resolution recognising the important role of human rights defenders in promoting and protecting human rights and calling on States to respect, protect and support their activities.

In this context, we welcome the Working Group's recognition as to the important and legitimate role of civil society organizations, trade unions and human rights defenders in raising awareness of the human rights impacts and risks of business enterprises and activities (A/HRC/23/32, para 49).

The recent building collapse and loss of more than 1000 lives in Rana Plaza in Bangladesh tragically demonstrates the consequences that can flow from the failure of businesses to meaningfully consult with human rights defenders to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for how they address their adverse human rights impacts.

Mr President, we are disturbed by the Working Group's reports of the harassment, persecution and reprisals faced by human rights defenders for their work investigating, protesting, and seeking access to remedies for victims of alleged abuses linked to business activities (A/HRC/23/32, paras 13 and 47).

In this regard, we recall that paragraph 26 of the Guiding Principles provides that both States and transnational corporations and other business enterprises must not obstruct or impair the legitimate and peaceful activities of human rights defenders. We urge States to investigate any alleged acts of intimidation or reprisal against human rights defenders working on issues of corporate accountability. We also draw attention to paragraph 25 of the Guiding Principles, which sets out that, as part of the duty to protect against business-related human rights abuses, States must take appropriate steps to ensure that when such abuses occur within their territory and/or jurisdiction those affected have access to effective remedy.

Finally, Mr President, we strongly support the Working Group's recommendation that States should increase protection and support for civil society organizations and human rights defenders that work on issues of corporate accountability.

Thank you.