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 **anti-slavery**

**Clean
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Campaign**

 **ECCJ**
European Coalition
for Corporate Justice

**CONFEDERATION
SYNDICAT
EUROPÉEN
TRADE UNION**

 **ITUC CSI IGB**

**Fair
Trade**
ADVOCACY OFFICE

 **FAIRTRADE
INTERNATIONAL**

Brussels, 5 February, 2019

To:

Mr Sipilä, Prime Minister.

Cc:

Mr Soini, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr Lintilä, Minister of Economic Affairs.

Ms Virolainen, Minister of Foreign Trade and Development.

Dear Prime Minister Sipilä,

We, the undersigned NGOs, are calling on the Finnish government to set an ambitious agenda for the implementation of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) at European Union (EU) level.

The Finnish government will hold the EU Presidency at a crucial time when the new Commission will identify and determine its priorities. This will be an important opportunity for Finland to show its increasing commitment to and leadership in the area of business and human rights.

Finland was one of the first countries in adopting a National Action Plan to implement the UNGPsⁱ. It was also one of the Member States which in 2017 called on the Commission to adopt an EU Action Plan on Responsible Business Conductⁱⁱ.

In contrast, the EU has not yet acted on its own commitment to come forward with an EU action plan on the implementation of the UNGPs. This is despite increasing recognition that business, while playing a role in the social and economic development of modern societies, can significantly damage the environment and violate human rights. In fact, an estimated 21 million people are victims of forced labor in the supply chains of global businesses.ⁱⁱⁱ In 2017 alone, over 300 human rights defenders were murdered worldwide; the overwhelming majority killed while protecting their lands and communities from business mega projects.^{iv} Countless other human rights violations such as gender based violence or poverty wages are taking place daily in the supply chains of European companies.

Nevertheless, the EU still lacks a coherent and comprehensive policy framework to ensure business' respect for human rights, now almost eight years after endorsing the UNGPs. In the absence of EU leadership, several European countries have taken initiative at national level and have adopted or are currently assessing legislation that would require companies to prevent adverse human rights and environmental impacts, whilst ensuring access to remedy for people who are harmed by business in their operations, their subsidiaries and along their supply chains.

France already adopted such a *duty of vigilance* law in 2017; Switzerland, an important EU partner, is at an advanced state of discussing a legislative proposal on mandatory Human Rights Due diligence and reformed corporate liability. Legislative proposals on specific human rights due diligence obligations have been tabled in Parliament in the Netherlands and Austria while Italy, Germany and Luxembourg have committed to assessing similar legislative initiatives.^v Moreover, Luxembourg has announced as part of the new Government's Coalition Agreement that it will engage in supporting EU binding legislation. Germany has made the same commitment if less than half of large German companies don't implement HRDD by 2020. In 2016, members of eight national parliaments expressed support for EU legislation imposing companies the duty to respect human rights in their global operations.^{vi}

Finland has a unique opportunity during its EU Presidency to ensure that business and human rights will be part of the next European Commission's priorities, and specifically to advance the debate on the need for Human Rights Due Diligence legislation at the EU level. In particular, a High-Level Conference would allow for Member States, the EU, and other stakeholders to discuss recent legislative processes and explore the way forward for a common EU approach to mandatory Human Rights Due Diligence.

We would be happy to share more concrete suggestions, on which we cooperate with members of the #ykkösketjuun campaign in Finland.

Yours sincerely,

Neelanjana Mukhia, Head of Global Engagement, **ActionAid International**.

Klara Skrivankova, Senior private sector adviser, **Anti-Slavery International**.

Ben Vanpeperstraete, Lobby and Advocacy Coordinator, **Clean Clothes Campaign**.

Claudia Saller, Coordinator, **the European Coalition for Corporate Justice (ECCJ)**.

Liina Carr, Confederal Secretary, **European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)**.

Sharan Burrow, Secretary General, **International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)**.

Sergi Corbalán, Executive Director, **Fair Trade Advocacy Office**.

Darío Soto Abril, Chief Executive Officer, **Fairtrade International**.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ [National Action Plan for the Implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#), Publications of the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, 46/2014.

ⁱⁱ [Letter](#) from Finland, Denmark, Sweden, France and The Netherlands to the Vice-President of the European Commission Frans Timmermans on a EU Action Plan on Responsible Business Conduct, September 2017.

ⁱⁱⁱ ILO, "[Statistics on forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking](#)".

^{iv} Frontline Defenders, "[Annual Report on Human Rights Defenders in 2017](#)".

^v An overview of such developments in Europe are collected in ECCJ Background Paper, "[Evidence for mandatory Human Rights Due Diligence Legislation](#)", September 2018.

^{vi} ECCJ, "[Members of 8 European Parliaments support duty of care legislation for EU corporations](#)", 31 May, 2016.