



NGOs & legal experts call on the EU to allow UK accession to Lugano Convention on access to justice grounds

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The United Kingdom must be allowed to accede to the Lugano Convention, a cross-border legal cooperation treaty, on grounds concerning access to judicial remedy for victims of corporate human rights abuses.

The Lugano Convention is an international judicial treaty negotiated by the EU with Iceland, Norway and Switzerland on matters of jurisdiction in civil matters. It supplements the corresponding Brussels I Regulation Recast, which only applies to EU members. On 8th April 2020 the UK applied to accede to the Lugano Convention.

The Lugano Convention and Brussels I Regulation Recast both overcome a longstanding barrier faced by overseas victims of corporate abuse when attempting to access judicial remedy – the so-called *forum non conveniens* doctrine.

The *forum non conveniens* doctrine allows a defendant corporation to argue that the most appropriate forum for cases against them is that of the victims' domicile. This allows the transfer of transnational cases against European companies away from European courts to jurisdictions where claimants are likely to face a variety of additional barriers to accessing justice.¹ The doctrine also provokes jurisdictional arguments that add years to litigation. The case [Lubbe & others v Cape PLC \(2000\)](#) is a tragic case in point, when around 1,000 out of the 7,500 foreign plaintiffs died awaiting the resolution of Cape PLC's *forum non conveniens* arguments in UK courts.

The Lugano Convention and Brussels I Regulation Recast overcome the *forum non conveniens* doctrine by establishing mandatory jurisdiction over companies where they are domiciled.² No other existing and applicable international judicial cooperation treaty, including those concluded under the Hague Conference on Private International Law, includes this same, essential rule.³

During the UK's membership to the EU, the Brussels I Regulation Recast facilitated the bringing of numerous historic claims against UK companies in UK courts by overseas victims of corporate human rights abuses in cases such as [Vedanta v. Lungowe \(2019\)](#) and [Okpabi v. Shell \(2021\)](#). It also led to numerous settlements providing much-needed financial remediation for overseas victims. Without the UK now joining the Lugano Convention, the doctrine will re-apply in future cases against UK

¹ See, for example, European Parliament DROI committee report, [Access to legal remedies for victims of corporate human rights abuses in third countries](#) (2019) p. 15; and ECCJ, ICAR, CORE Coalition, [The Third Pillar: Access to Judicial Remedies for Human Rights Violations by Transnational Businesses](#) (2013) p. 23.

² By virtue of Articles 2.1 and 4.1 respectively. In 2005 the Court of Justice of the European Union, in [Andrew Owusu v. N. B. Jackson](#), confirmed the removal of the *forum non conveniens* doctrine by virtue of the Brussels I Regulation.

³ In fact relevant [initiative discussions on jurisdiction within the Hague Conference on Private International](#) even indicate a possible re-introduction of the *Forum Non Conveniens* doctrine.

corporations in UK courts. This would be a damaging blow to corporate accountability at exactly the time UK courts are beginning to recognise causes of action against UK companies for harms abroad; and when the EU is developing a corporate human rights and environmental due diligence regime with proposed improvements to judicial remedy for victims harmed by EU companies abroad.

Under Pillar III of the *United Nations Guiding Principles on Business & Human Rights*, the EU and its Member States have committed to advancing access to judicial remedy for victims of corporate human rights abuses. In light of this international human rights commitment, the United Kingdom must be allowed to accede to the Lugano Convention.

Signatory Networks & Organisations:

[European Coalition for Corporate Justice](#)

[Corporate Justice Coalition UK](#)

[Fédération internationale des Droits de l'Homme / International Federation for Human Rights](#)

[European Centre for Constitutional & Human Rights \(ECCHR\)](#)

[Human Rights Watch](#)

[Amnesty International](#)

[Anti-Slavery International](#)

[Clean Clothes Campaign](#)

[Brot für die Welt / Bread for the World](#)

[Human Rights International Corner](#)

[CIDSE](#)

[Sherpa](#)

Signatory Legal Experts

[Michael Bogdan](#), Professor Emeritus of Comparative and Private International Law, University of Lund, Sweden

[Professor Francisco J. Zamora Cabot](#), Chair Professor of Private international Law, Universitat Jaume I of Castellón, Coordinator, REDH-EXATA, Spain

[Dr Claire Bright](#), Associate Research Fellow at the British Institute of International and Comparative Law; Assistant Professor in Private Law at Nova Law School, Portugal

[Gabrielle Holly](#), Senior Adviser, Human Rights and Business Department, Danish Institute for Human Rights, Denmark

[Dr. Başak Bağlayan](#), Post-doctoral Researcher, Department of Law, University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg

[Dr Nadia Bernaz](#), Associate Professor of Law, Wageningen University, the Netherlands

[Prof. Dr. Markus Krajewski](#), Fachbereich Rechtswissenschaft, FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany

[Dr Onyeka Osuji](#), Professor of Law, University of Essex School of Law, United Kingdom

[Dr Tara Van Ho](#), Lecturer, University of Essex School of Law and Human Rights Centre, United Kingdom

[Professor Robert McCorquodale](#), Professor of International Law and Human Rights, University of Nottingham; and barrister and mediator, Brick Court Chambers, United Kingdom

[Peter Muchlinski Emeritus Professor of International Commercial Law](#), SOAS, University of London and Door Tenant, Brick Court Chambers, United Kingdom

[Dr. Mark B. Taylor](#), Senior Researcher, Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research, Norway

[Dr Jernej Letnar Čerinič](#), Professor of Law, European Faculty of Law, New University, Slovenia

[Dr Anil Yilmaz Vastardis](#), Senior Lecturer, University of Essex School of Law and Human Rights Centre, Co-director of the Essex Business and Human Rights Project, United Kingdom

[Dr Ekaterina Aristova](#), Postdoctoral Fellow at the Bonavero Institute of Human Rights (University of Oxford) and co-convenor of Oxford Business and Human Rights Network, United Kingdom

[Dr. Lucas Roorda](#), Assistant Professor, Utrecht University, and Postdoctoral Researcher, Utrecht Center for Accountability and Liability Law, The Netherlands

[Dr Manuel Penades Fons](#), Senior Lecturer in International Commercial Law, King's College London, United Kingdom

[Professor Andreas Rahmatian](#), Professor of Commercial Law, University of Glasgow, United Kingdom

[Dr. Marta Bordignon](#), President at Human Rights International Corner (HRIC), Adjunct Faculty at Temple University, Rome Campus, Italy

[Marco Fasciglione](#), Researcher in International Law, Italian National Research Council (CNR), Alternate Member of the Management Board of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), Italy

[Maria Pia Sacco](#), Senior Project Lawyer, IBA Legal Policy and Research Unit, United Kingdom

[Elise Groulx Diggs](#), Co-Chair of the IBA Business Human Rights Committee, Associate tenant at Doughty Street Chambers, United Kingdom

[Dr Joanna Hoekstra](#), Lecturer, University of Essex School of Law, United Kingdom

[Nicolás Carrillo-Santarelli](#), Associate Researcher of the Human Rights and Business Institute, University of Monterrey (UEM), and Professor in the Masters Programme of International Law at La Sabana University, Colombia