ACCA STATEMENT ON THE ANNUAL UN FORUM ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS:

THE ROLE OF AFRICAN REPRESENTATION

16 – 18 NOVEMBER 2015

Released on 27 November 2015

The African Coalition for Corporate Accountability (ACCA) is a coalition of 89 organisations from 28 African countries supporting communities and individuals whose human rights are adversely affected by the daily activities of corporations on the African continent. ACCA commends the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights (Working Group) for convening the 4th Annual Forum on Business and Human Rights in Geneva (Forum), from 16 – 18 November 2015. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) serves as the global convener on human rights issues, and to this end, ACCA sees the Forum as an important opportunity to hear from all key stakeholders.

While the discussions have brought together stakeholders from across the globe, ACCA is concerned about the apparent absence of African voices at the Forum. Those participants and panellists sponsored by international organisations, including the United Nations, are predominantly from the global North. It is worth noting that not a single black African woman was present on any of the official Forum panels. The importance of having a context-specific gendered perspective presented cannot be overemphasised. Bearing in mind that the Forum brings together stakeholders from all interest groups, ACCA is also extremely disappointed by the apparent lack of participation by African government representatives.

It is important to note that most, if not all, of the thematic issues discussed at the Forum are particularly relevant to the African context. Africa is a resources rich continent with well-established sectors and industries in extractives, manufacturing, energy, infrastructure, and agriculture – all of which are closely associated with adverse human rights impacts and have been topics of debate at the Forum. African representatives are crucial stakeholders in these discussions, and progress cannot be made without input from the continent.

ACCA takes cognisance of the fact that the location of the Forum makes it difficult for participants from the global South to access and attend the Forum. ACCA further accepts that the regional forums, also hosted by the Working Group, are specifically aimed at fostering regional dialogue and participation in the discussions around business and human rights. However, it is disappointing that the views and findings from the Africa regional forum, held in September 2014 in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), cannot be brought to the global audience at the Forum on a consistent basis by African representatives.

ACCA is mindful of the need for large scale resources to create an equal platform for civil society from all regions to share their experiences at the Forum. We are confident that such resources can and should include all regions, including Africa. Not only would this allow for multi-stakeholder engagement on an issue that is central to Africa, but it would also incentivise future engagement on the topic and the involvement of African role-players in global discussions around business and human rights.

ACCA commits itself to advocating for greater African participation and involvement in debates around business and human rights, and welcomes engagement on the issue from interested parties.

ACCA

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