

9 December 2014

ACCA Statement on the UN Forum in Geneva

From 1 to 3 December 2014, half a dozen members of the African Coalition for Corporate Accountability (ACCA) participated and organized side events in Geneva, Switzerland at the third annual United Nations Forum on Business and Human Rights (UN Forum) guided by the United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights.

These ACCA members commend the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights for a well-run and well-attended meeting. Over 1 500 people registered for the UN Forum, among them, members of the African Union and representatives of the Algerian, Egyptian, Ghanaian, Mozambican, Nigerian, South African, Sudanese and Tunisian governments. We express concern, however, at the low level of participation from African civil society, especially given the momentum recently created in September at the African Regional Forum on Business and Human Rights. In order to truly address the human rights violations faced by Africans, African civil society needs to be present and heard at global meetings of this nature. As such, ACCA calls on the UN Working Group to do more to facilitate access to the UN Forum by African civil society.

The UN Forum's robust discussions about the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, National Action Plans and a binding treaty illustrated both the concern attached to human rights violations and the vibrancy of civil society. This is commended. As such, ACCA calls on the newly formed Intergovernmental Working Group on a Binding Treaty (IWG) and African governments to ensure that a space is provided to African civil society at the first IWG meeting scheduled for the week of 6 July 2015. We also call on African governments to participate in the IWG and, paraphrase what Prof John Ruggie said about the UNGPs and the binding treaty: they are not and should not be treated as mutually exclusive.

Members of ACCA present at the UN Forum also express concern at the fact that subsequent forums do not appear to build on former forums. More should be done by the UN Working Group to ensure that the 2015 UN Forum builds on, and adds to, the 2014 UN Forum. Similarly, the UN Annual Forum should build on the Regional Forums, such as the African Regional Forum held in Addis Ababa in September 2014 — doing so will serve to cement actors' commitment to human rights standards and monitor compliance and progress.



In conclusion, ACCA calls on states to actively take steps to prevent human rights violations and calls on businesses to adhere to their responsibility to respect human rights. In this effort, ACCA will pursue its vision of a continent where communities' right to development is fulfilled and their agency to fully participate in the exercise of this right is respected. We envision an Africa where human rights are promoted, protected, and respected by business and governments, and victims and affected communities of human rights violations have access to adequate and effective remedies.



