

Joint Press Release by Germanwatch, MISEREOR, European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) and the German civil society networks Forum Human Rights and Corporate Accountability (CorA)

## Rights and Accountability: States and Companies need to act on Business and Human Rights issues

### International conference discusses policy approaches to implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in Germany and Europe

Berlin, 23rd November 2011: Germany needs to strengthen its efforts to implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights adopted five months ago as well as the new CSR communication on corporate social responsibility by the European Commission. Representatives from governments, NGOs from developed and developing countries, companies, trade unions and academia from about 15 countries discussed the role of Germany and the European Union regarding corporate social responsibility and accountability. They met at a conference in Berlin that ended yesterday.

"Europe will be at the lead in the world by bringing forward priorities for the implementation of Ruggie's Business and Human Rights Principles by next year and there is no excuse to ignore this framework," said Richard Howitt, European Parliament Spokesperson on Corporate Social Responsibility, in his message to the conference "I invite Germany, the German government and German businesses to address the challenge of a smart mix between different policy approaches. The UN Guiding Principles end the old argument of mandatory versus voluntary."

Raymond Salas, a lawyer from the Philippines defending cases of people affected by corporate human rights abuses, added: "We think it is essential that governments hold transnational companies accountable. Host and home countries of transnational corporations should have laws in place that enable people affected by corporate human rights abuses to take legal action against the respective companies if necessary. Access to remedy and justice for the victims of corporate human rights abuse must be strengthened."

Furthermore, Christoph Strässer, member of the committee for Human Rights of the German Bundestag, called for a full disclosure of the supply chain. "Germany needs to amend its laws to enforce corporate responsibility with regard to human rights," Strässer said at the conference.

The UN Guiding Principles set a framework for both governments and companies to protect and respect human rights. Companies, investors and international organisations, such as the International Organisation of Employers and the International Chamber of Commerce support the UN Guiding Principles. They were endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2011 without a vote.

### Background information

The international conference "Rights and Accountability - The Way Ahead for Business and Human Rights" took place in Berlin 21-22 November 2011. Conference participants discussed how the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights could be implemented both in Germany and Europe. The issues addressed included state duties with regard to human rights abuses by private actors, and effective remedies for those affected by corporate human rights abuse.

The conference was organised by Germanwatch, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, MISEREOR, European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) and the German civil society networks Forum Human Rights and Corporate Accountability (CorA).

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