



France adopts corporate duty of vigilance law: a first historic step towards better human rights and environmental protection

22 February 2017: The French Parliament adopted a much-awaited law establishing a duty of vigilance obligation for parent and subcontracting companies. The law marks a historic step towards improving corporate respect for human rights and the environment. We call on European countries, the EU institutions, and the international community to develop similar legislation.

5 years ago, French candidate François Hollande declared he wanted *'to incorporate into legislation liability of multinationals for the activities of their subcontractors and subsidiaries abroad when they create human rights and environmental violations.'* The French law on duty of care, one of the last one adopted by his government, meets this promise.

When companies default on these obligations, the law empowers victims and other concerned parties to bring the issue before a judge. This bill will allow to prevent human and environmental rights violations created by multinational activities.

Despite being a major achievement, French civil society organizations argue the law's text could have been more ambitious. The law's scope is limited, only covering around 100 large companies. The burden of proof still falls on the victims – who often lack the means to seek justice – further accentuating the imbalance of power between large companies and victims of abuse. Furthermore, if damages are incurred despite a parent company having implemented an adequate vigilance plan, the company will not be liable: a company is not required to guarantee results, but only to prove that it has done everything in its power to avoid damages.

France has taken a first step today, but it should be followed by similar binding legislation at national, European and international level, to make globalization work for all. We ask the French Government to continue on this path and promote the duty of vigilance law at European and international level, and show support for other initiatives aiming to improve corporate accountability, like the UN Treaty on Business and Human Rights in order to guaranty a globalization respectful of populations and our planet.

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