

Berne, 10 October 2016

## Swiss quality must include the protection of human rights and the environment

*The Swiss Responsible Business Initiative will be presented to the Swiss authorities today. The 80 civil society organizations supporting the initiative share one common goal: Swiss quality must incorporate the protection of human rights and the environment.*

The 120'000 valid signatures gathered for the [Swiss Responsible Business Initiative](#) will be handed over to the Swiss government today. The constitutional amendment proposed by the initiative is based on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, unanimously adopted by the UN Human Rights Council in 2011. The initiative compels Swiss-based multinational companies to undertake human rights and environmental due diligence in all their business activities abroad. In practice, companies will have to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for how they address their adverse human rights and environmental impacts and those of the entities under their control. If a corporation does not fulfill its mandatory due diligence, it may be held to account for abuses committed by a subsidiary abroad.

Switzerland's reputation is a major asset of its economy. Swiss quality stands for high standards, meticulousness and fair business relations. Companies benefitting from this reputation abroad must comply with international norms. In reality however, a number of Swiss-based companies still do not take into account the human rights and environmental impacts of their activities, nor do they take the appropriate steps to avoid or eliminate abuses. By bridging this current loophole, the Swiss Responsible Business Initiative seeks to ensure that the protection of human rights and the environment becomes an integral part of Swiss quality.

This initiative is part of a wider international trend towards binding rules for multinational companies. In recent months, the Council of Europe and the European Parliament, as well as eight national Parliaments of EU Member States, have spoken in favor of mandatory human rights due diligence.

The Swiss Responsible Business Initiative is supported by a broad coalition of 80 civil society organizations, which will immediately begin to prepare for the referendum's campaign. According to a recent survey, 89% of the population wants Swiss-based companies to be compelled to respect human rights and the environment abroad. Furthermore, 92% think that corporations should ensure that companies under their control do the same. Despite the lack of political action in this regard, these numbers indicate a wide public concern for corporate responsibility.

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