

## Clear Rules for Corporations. Worldwide.

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

For the past 13 years we have organized a counter-event here in Davos, and for the eighth time we are conferring the Public Eye Awards on corporations that trample on human rights and destroy the environment. Why do we do it? Wouldn't it be better, in these times of so much bad news, to be more constructive and commend the good corporations instead of reprimanding the bad ones?

No.

First of all, the firms already engage in plenty of self-praise – and with far larger budgets than we will ever have. Secondly, every year we hear from the World Economic Forum how the world must be saved. But there are countless human rights violations and disgraceful acts against the environment that get lost in the information glut. Time and again misdeeds are committed in the Global South, by firms in the North, which remain nameless here while the firms with information campaigns polish their sparkling images.

And this is exactly what we want to change. We want to confront the world of marketing slogans and greenwashing with reality; to give the victims a voice, to give them a platform. It is indeed our goal that these awards leave a few scratches on the images of irresponsible firms. It must be made crystal clear in executive offices that: 1) human rights violations cannot be concealed, and 2) those violations will ultimately be very bad for business.

But we are also pursuing a longer-term goal with the Public Eye Awards. All the nominations, which we publish annually, reveal a striking absence of the rule of law. The nominations are an outcry against a system in which human rights criminals and environmental desecrators need not fear punishment. While business operates with ease across borders every day, the rule of law has remained largely a national phenomenon. This must change.

With this goal in mind, the Berne Declaration, Greenpeace, and 50 other NGOs in Switzerland ranging from Amnesty to WWF, along with unions, ethical investors, and doctors' and lawyers' organizations, launched the "Justice Without Borders" campaign last November. Similar to the European Coalition for Corporate Justice – our counterpart at the EU level – we believe that Corporate Social Responsibility is not enough. What is required is Corporate Accountability: Corporations must be reined in.

The demands of the coalition are simple but far reaching. Legal principles are needed so that:

- ⤴ Swiss corporations must take precautionary measures (due diligence) for their activities, their subsidiaries and suppliers, to prevent human rights violations and environmental crimes here and elsewhere
- ⤴ people who suffer because of the activities of Swiss corporations, their subsidiaries or suppliers can file suit and demand compensation here

Both are still rarely the case. And this shortcoming provides the basis from which injustice proliferates. Naturally, these rules are needed not only in Switzerland. But they are especially important here, given the ever-increasing number of transnational corporations with headquarters in Switzerland. Whether Glencore in Congo, Trafigura in Ivory Coast, Syngenta in Burkina Faso, or Triumph in Thailand: Time and again Swiss companies come into conflict with human rights and environmental standards. Be it firms from the booming Swiss commodities hub or the wounded banking center, the offenses are omnipresent. Changes in the law, in order to hold firms accountable, have never been more urgently needed.