

Please reply to:
Deborah Doane
Director
The Corporate Responsibility (CORE) Coalition
26-28 Underwood Street
London
N1 7JQ

Tuesday 6 June 2006

Dear Prime Minister,

We the undersigned – representing companies, charities, human rights, environment and development groups, women’s groups, trade unions and faith groups – are writing to urge you to deliver further on your public support in 2005 for the aims of Make Poverty History by amending the Government’s Company Law Reform Bill. We believe that the Bill is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to ensure that UK companies conduct their business dealings in a manner that is profitable, ethical and truly sustainable.

In 2002, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, you set out a vision for a global future based on sustainable and fair development, on “globalisation with justice”. We agree with you, but believe that ensuring real justice needs to address the role that we in wealthy nations play in contributing to or causing the problems poor countries face.

Some UK companies set a positive example of how profitability and ethical business can go hand in hand by making major contributions to the communities where they operate. Yet organisations in the Trade Justice Movement and Corporate Responsibility (CORE) Coalition have provided evidence of numerous examples of corporate abuse by UK companies. We believe it is time that companies are made more accountable for their impacts.

The British public agree with us. A recent poll showed that 90 per cent of voters think “the Government should set out enforceable rules to ensure companies are socially responsible”. The public must be confident that British companies are not profiting at the expense of people and the environment. This means a framework of Company Law that places greater emphasis on social and environmental performance.

This Bill, being debated in the Commons today, offers your Government a unique opportunity to ensure that British businesses are responsible and accountable, no matter where in the world they operate. We urge you to amend the Bill so that:

- 1. Companies are legally required to report on their social and environmental impacts.*
- 2. Directors have a legal duty to take reasonable steps to minimise the harm their company cause to local communities and the environment.*
- 3. People overseas who are harmed by a UK company and denied justice in their own country can take legal action in a UK court with access to legal aid.*

The Government has rightly recognised that this Bill is the correct place to deal with the environmental and social impacts of corporate behaviour. However, a far bolder approach is urgently needed if British companies are going to play their part in making poverty history.

Yours sincerely,

Deborah Doane
Director
The Corporate Responsibility (CORE) Coalition

Glen Tarman
Coordinator
Trade Justice Movement

Richard Miller
Director
ActionAid UK

Kate Allen
Director
Amnesty International UK

Jacqui Mackay
National Coordinator
Banana Link

Richard Bennett
General Secretary
BOND (British Overseas NGOs for Development)

Penny Newman
Chief Executive
Cafédirect plc

Chris Bain
Director
CAFOD

Maggie Robbins
UK Director
Centre for Corporate Accountability

Paul Valentin
International Director
Christian Aid

Miles Litvinoff
Coordinator
Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility

Harriet Lamb
Director
The Fairtrade Foundation

Tony Juniper
Executive Director
Friends of the Earth England, Wales & N. Ireland

David Forsdick
Barrister
Landmark Chambers

Martyn Day
Senior Partner
Leigh Day & Co

Fay Mansell
Chair
National Federation of Women's Institutes

Wendy Martin
Editor
New Consumer Magazine

Graham Bennett
Director
One World Action

Barbara Stocking
Director
Oxfam GB

Ian Leggett
Director
People & Planet

Sophie Paton
Co-ordinator
Peru Support Group

Mark Serwotka
General Secretary
Public and Commercial Services Union

Paul Noon
General Secretary
Prospect

Paul Chitnis
Chief Executive
Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF)

Ben Gilchrist
Director
SPEAK

Matthew Frost
Chief Executive
Tearfund

Paul Chandler
Chief Executive
Traidcraft Exchange

Charles Middleton
UK Managing Director
Triodos Bank NV

Jeremy Wagg
Executive Director, Relationships and Marketing
Unity Trust Bank plc

Louise Richards
Chief Executive
War on Want

Benedict Southworth
Director
World Development Movement

Robert Napier
Chief Executive
WWF-UK

Rt Revd. Dr Michael Nazir-Ali
Bishop of Rochester

Rt Rev Tim Stevens
Bishop of Leicester

cc The Rt. Hon. Alistair Darling MP, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

cc Margaret Hodge MBE MP, Minister of State for Industry and the Regions