



## Company law key to tackling poverty, groups tell Blair

PM targeted with open letter as Company Law Bill enters Commons.

6 June 2006

The Prime Minister will be urged to follow up on his commitment to tackling global poverty today (Tuesday 6 June 2006) as the Company Law Reform Bill enters the House of Commons. Faith groups, campaigners and lawyers say the Bill represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to ensure that business operates for the benefit of people and the environment [1].

They have called on the Prime Minister, in an open letter, to follow up on his public commitments to more sustainable development and amend the Bill so that company directors have a legal duty to take reasonable steps to minimise the harm their company may cause to local communities and the environment [2].

The letter, which has been coordinated by the Trade Justice Movement and the Corporate Responsibility (CORE) campaign also calls for a legal requirement for companies to report on their social and environmental impacts and improved access to legal action in UK courts for people overseas affected by the impacts of a UK company.

Hannah Ellis, Coordinator of the Corporate Responsibility Coalition (CORE) said:

The Prime Minister has been a great advocate for tackling global poverty and this Bill provides his Government with a real opportunity to do just that. UK companies currently benefit from access to cheap resources and labour overseas, but do not always consider the impact of their activities on the local environment or the community or act responsibly. The law currently recognises that companies may wish to consider the impacts they have, but is not tough enough. The Government must be bolder in their approach and ensure that UK companies become a real force for good rather than too often a cause for shame.

The letter follows pleas from more than 100,000 people around the country who have urged their MPs to support these changes to the Company Law Reform Bill. And a poll of the general public found that 90 per cent of voters agreed that the Government should set out enforceable rules to ensure companies are socially responsible .

Traidcraft and the Bishops of Leicester and Rochester are among a host of charities, faith groups and lawyers urging Tony Blair to use Company Law to help end poverty.

The open letter with over 30 high profile signatories calls on Tony Blair to ensure that he supports changes to Company Law which would help ensure last year's promises to tackle poverty are met.

- [View the letter sent to the Prime Minister](#) (PDF)
- [See the full page advert in the Guardian newspaper](#) (PDF)

Signatories to the letter are:

- Deborah Doane, Director, The Corporate Responsibility (CORE) Coalition
- Glen Tarman, Coordinator, Trade Justice Movement
- Paul Chandler, Chief Executive, Traidcraft Exchange
- 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, Caf direct 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, 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
- 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