

GIFA Oral Statement
1st session of IGWG on TNCs and human rights
July 6, 10AM-1PM / General Comments

Thank you Chairperson. I am speaking on behalf of the International Baby Food Action Network, the Pesticide Action Network Asia and Pacific, Friends of the Earth Europe, SOMO and the Global Policy Forum, members of the Treaty Alliance.

We welcome the opening of the first session of the open-ended intergovernmental working group for the elaboration of an International Legally Binding Instrument on Transnational Corporations and other Business Enterprises with respect to human rights. We are very glad to see countries and civil society taking part in this crucial process and would like to encourage all States to engage constructively in the discussions.

This is a historical step for all citizens, particularly for those affected by corporate abuses, who have struggled for many years for justice. Therefore, we urge you to ensure meaningful involvement of these affected communities in the treaty process in order to ensure that their needs are met.

To date, millions if not billions of people are negatively affected by corporate activities. Abuses are more frequent and apparent in the South, although communities from the North are also suffering from corporate misconduct such as chemical contamination and promotion of unsafe or unhealthy food. In addition, negative external costs related to corporate activities, including adverse and irreparable impacts on health and environment, are often borne by affected communities themselves as well as by public institutions and national governments. Whenever the affected communities organize to claim their rights and seek for remedies, their leaders regularly face threats to their security and even to their life.

Besides, whistle-blowers are often harassed or fired for having reported or disclosed information on a threat or harm to the public interest. Human rights defenders and whistle-blowers are at the forefront to get corporations accountable and thus should be provided special protection by the treaty. During a side event that took place yesterday, we had the opportunity to hear about the experience of a whistle-blower, Dr Yasmine Motarjemi, former

executive in charge of global food safety at Nestlé, who denounced existing corporate strategies to continue putting business interests ahead of human rights with impunity.

Therefore, we would like to stress the necessity to put in place adequate safeguards to guarantee that the treaty process is not unduly influenced by the private sector and thus, to ensure its independence, integrity and credibility. These safeguards should be set up as a priority, in a transparent manner, and should include concrete measures that help identify and eliminate risks of personal or institutional conflicts of interests.

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate our support to this treaty process. We will continue to provide information to the intergovernmental working group and mobilize our respective networks at international, regional and national levels. Thank you.