



Press Release

Berne, 13 March 2015

Swiss parliament motion for mandatory human rights due diligence narrowly turned down

Conservative backlash blocks increased corporate accountability

Following a turbulent debate, the Swiss lower chamber of parliament initially accepted a motion yesterday for increased corporate accountability only to repeat the vote and ultimately dismiss the motion. This decision shows how a narrow majority in the lower chamber of the Swiss parliament continues to obstruct a sustainable Swiss human rights and foreign economic policy. The Swiss Corporate Justice Campaign is launching a popular initiative for responsible business this April so that Swiss citizens can weigh in on this important issue.

The Foreign Affairs Committee requested the introduction of mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence for Swiss corporations. This parliamentary proposal, focusing on prevention, has gained broad support from business and political circles. Professor John Ruggie, the former UN Special Representative and author of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, welcomed this motion as well. Yesterday's evening vote had a promising start; after an in-depth debate about this important issue, the motion was accepted by one vote, with the President of the lower chamber breaking a tie (91 voting in favour, 90 against). For roughly one and a half hours Switzerland was a political leader in international corporate accountability.

Despite a broad alliance, an about-face followed later that evening. Due to pressure from the conservative business lobbies (SwissHoldings, Economiesuisse), the right political parties requested a re-vote. Shortly before the end of the session at 6:47 PM, the second vote ended with 95 voting against the motion and 86 in favour.

A very significant minority of elected Swiss representatives wants Switzerland to strengthen the accountability of its multinational enterprises, while conservative forces, ignoring the international trend towards more corporate accountability, continue to stand in the way. The blockage of this pivotal aspect of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights clearly shows that without further pressure, Switzerland will not change. That's why over 60 non-governmental organizations are jointly launching the Popular Initiative for Responsible Business in April. This political tool is urgently needed and more promising than ever.

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** Notes to the editor:*

Popular Initiatives in Switzerland: This quite unique Swiss instrument allows for a binding popular vote on a proposal of a constitutional amendment if 100'000 signatures can be collected in an 18-month period.

The **Swiss Coalition for Corporate Justice (SCCJ)** is a coalition of 60 development and human rights organizations, environmental and women's organizations, trade unions, church groups and critical shareholder associations. The Coalition advocates for clear rules for international companies, so that they must respect human rights and environmental standards worldwide. www.corporatejustice.ch