

**55th Session of the UN Human Rights Council
Item 3: General Debate**

15 March 2024

Delivered by Blair Matheson

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Mr. President,

This statement is on behalf of Feminists for a Binding Treaty, a network working collectively to advocate for a gender-responsive treaty since 2016 of which Franciscans International is a member.

The communities we live in, work with, and represent globally continue to underscore the urgent need for a binding instrument aimed at the prevention of, and accountability for, human rights violations by corporations. While we are encouraged that the draft presented ahead of the 9th UN session on such a treaty makes efforts to address gender equality, we remain concerned that the new text weakens corporations' obligations to respect human rights, by presenting a pared-down definition of human rights due diligence and referring to corporate responsibilities, rather than obligations. The draft makes State obligations subject to domestic law, undermining the entire purpose of the treaty to strengthen the core obligations required when conducting business activities. We further note that important language on the environment, and on conflict, has been removed from the draft.

We note the session report's recommendation for a "procedural decision to the Human Rights Council to request human and financial resources necessary to move the process forward." Here, we support a narrow procedural decision to facilitate a more expedited process, via transparent inter-sessional meetings that include active engagement by States and civil society. We encourage States to support the report's recommendations, and continue to commit to the process, negotiating a document that will effectively protect communities facing marginalization and exploitation.

Last, we underscore our continued concern over corporate capture, both at the IGWG and at the UN more generally. Under the guise of "multi-stakeholderism," business interests continue to be prioritized over human rights and the environment.

Relatedly, we note a troubling trend of Global North governments, especially the U.S., working in concert with industry to question the need for this treaty and instead emphasize voluntary principles like the U.N. Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights – which have been shown to be woefully inadequate. We call on all governments, especially Global North governments where the majority of transnational corporations are headquartered, to support a strong, legally binding treaty that can set a floor for regulating corporations in a way that is in line with human rights and gender justice.

Considering the growing negative impact of corporations on human rights, we reaffirm that a binding instrument is not only essential, it is urgent.

Thank you.