Press release

HUMAN RIGHTS ACCOUNTABILITY NOW!
The World Social Forum’s Human Dignity and Human Rights Caucus challenges States and Private Corporations gathered in Davos

World Social Forum’s Global Day of Action, 26 January 2008: “During the World Economic Forum in Davos, States and private corporations must be held accountable for their human rights obligations” says Mr Davinder Lamba, the President of Habitat International Coalition (HIC).

On the occasion of the World Social Forum Global Day of Action 2008, the Human Dignity and Human Rights Caucus (HDHRC), a global coalition of human rights and development organizations, demands that States and corporations put an end to global human rights violations. During economic downturns in particular, poor people suffer a dramatic increase in violations of their basic human rights. Marginalized people in rural and urban areas are confronted with persistent inability to realize their rights to land, water, food and social services. They are often victims of forced eviction, as their land is used for large development projects or for resource extraction. In many countries, increasing conflicts and militarization are making a culture of impunity a daily reality. We are seeing a rapid surge in the number of internally displaced persons, migrant workers, refugees and all groups confronted with citizenship gaps, particularly women.

As the World Economic Forum 2008 gathers highly influential players in the world economy and politics, the Caucus stresses the fundamental importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - the 60th anniversary of the adoption of which is being marked this year - in the current debate over the environment, including climate change, toxic waste dumping and energy. Environmental damage directly threaten the right to life, to health, to water, to development, to housing, to work, to culture and the rights of indigenous people. Affected populations have the right to be protected from adverse environmental impacts, such as polluted water, soil and air, deforestation, and displacements that result from desertification or floods caused by climate change.

Although States are accountable for harmonizing public policies and national laws with their international obligations, they are often ineffective or complicit in human rights violations. Non-state actors also have human rights responsibilities. An increasing number of private actors are committing human rights violations. These actors include private security firms, armed rebellion and paramilitary groups, as well as transnational corporations. Some of the latter extract, pollute and destroy scarce environmental resources and operate with poor labor standards. International Organizations too can have negative impacts on human rights. They prescribe economic policies to governments that contravene their human rights commitments, introduce private land markets, encourage privatization of water sources, enforce high health services fees and finance large development infrastructures. As non-state actors become more influential, their potential impacts on human rights increase.

“It is not only States that bare responsibility for human rights” says Peter N. Prove from the Human Rights Office of The Lutheran World Federation. “Human rights are the business of all parties whose actions affect the realization and enjoyment of those rights. Such parties include international financial institutions, the United Nations, multilateral agencies, private and public companies, foreign governments, local private interests, civil society organizations and individuals.”

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