Summary of Treaty Alliance Activities, Jan-June 2014

In June 2014 the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) passed a resolution that established a new UN Intergovernmental Working Group mandated to establish an international treaty to address corporate human rights violations. This document provides a summary of actions taken by a global civil society alliance –the Treaty Alliance– that advocated strongly for the passage of this resolution.

1. The Treaty Alliance

The Treaty Alliance is a group of committed networks and organizations coordinating activities in support of developing binding international regulation to address corporate human rights violations. In addition to the ESCR-Net Corporate Accountability Working Group (CAWG), the founding groups of this alliance were, in alphabetical order, CETIM, Dismantle Corporate Power Campaign, FIAN, FIDH, Franciscans International, Friends of the Earth International and Transnational Institute.

To build consensus around clear civil society demands, the Treaty Alliance promoted support for a joint statement, which was first drafted by participants of the first annual ESCR-Net Peoples’ Forum on Human Rights and Business. As of March 2014 approximately 150 organizations had signed this joint statement, which by the end of the Human Rights Council Session in June 2014 had swelled to 610 organizations, and an additional 400 individuals.

2. Summary of Activities by National Partners

In the lead up to the 26th UN Human Rights Council (HRC) Session, the Treaty Alliance engaged with partner organizations in 95 countries across the world with specific attention on organizations based in countries which were members of the HRC. The Treaty Alliance drafted template advocacy materials in English, Spanish, French & Portuguese to support national advocacy efforts including a:

- Draft letter to a HRC member government
- Draft press release for use at the national level
- Q&A document

Early in 2014, the Treaty Alliance encouraged partner organizations to engage with their national government and national press on the issue to start building support for a treaty process. As the 26th Session of the HRC grew closer the Treaty Alliance also supported organizations to engage with their national representative in Geneva, reinforcing key messages of earlier letters and press releases in meetings with these representatives.

The Treaty Alliance is aware of national advocacy activities which took place in at least 20 countries, including:

- Letters sent to national governments by national-level partners in at least 15 countries;
- Letters sent by eight different national-level partners to Permanent Missions in Geneva;
- Meetings arranged by national-level partners to discuss their government’s support for the treaty in at least four HRC member countries.

‘The Treaty Alliance engaged with partner organizations in 95 countries between March & June 2014’.
There were also public activities that took place supporting the call for a binding treaty. In Norway, FIAN Norway and Norwegian Peoples Aid held a debate at ForUM (including participants from Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs) on the prospect of a binding treaty. In the Philippines, Mining Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM), Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP), and other civil society organizations, held a protest outside the Filipino Department of Foreign Affairs to support the push for a binding instrument on human rights and business.

The Treaty Alliance also sent a letter to all Permanent Missions who were members of the UN Human Rights Council to encourage them to support a treaty process. This effort was then echoed by individual members of the Treaty Alliance; for instance, Food and Water Watch emailed all Permanent Missions. Members of the Treaty Alliance in Geneva met with the Permanent Missions of HRC member-States on more than 50 occasions between January and June.

3. ESCR-Net Activities

In the period of January to June 2014, representatives of ESCR-Net:

- Met with Permanent Missions of HRC member-states on more than 25 occasions between January and June, urging support for the creation of an intergovernmental working group to discuss the drafting of a treaty to address corporate human rights violations;
- Maintained the Treaty Alliance website, which acted as the primary information-source and support resource for organizations wishing to engage in advocacy work in many different countries;
- Constructed a contact database containing over 600 national-level civil society partners, as well as Geneva- and national-level contacts for all current HRC member-States;
- Encouraged all organizations that were based in HRC member-States and supported the Joint Statement to undertake advocacy efforts urging their governments to support the initiative, and kept them updated throughout the process in Geneva;
- With support from other Treaty Alliance members, drafted the series of template advocacy documents used by national partner organizations in their advocacy efforts;
- Produced daily blog articles and constantly populated the Treaty Alliance twitter account (@TreatyAlliance), ensuring constant public reporting for national-level partners not in Geneva on developments throughout the HRC session, covering the evolving positions of States and negotiations on the resolution text; and
- In the final advocacy efforts in Geneva, drafted and sent communications to all HRC member Permanent Missions urging their support for the initiative.

4. Treaty Alliance Week of Mobilization, June 23-27

In the week leading up to the vote on the resolution at the HRC a week of mobilization took place, involving a number of Treaty Alliance members and supporters of the Joint Statement. The week of mobilization was a convergence of social movements and civil society organizations in Geneva to support the development of an effective international system to defend against corporate human rights violations. Several different types of events took place including:

- Public testimonies from victims and affected communities;
- Side events outlining the need for a treaty;
- Strategy meetings;
- A picket outside the Palais des Nations; and
- A tour of landmark transnational corporations headquarters in Geneva.
5. Post-HRC Follow-up

After the resolution passed, members of the Treaty Alliance issued press releases acknowledging the progress made in the HRC, including ESCR-Net. The Treaty Alliance also circulated a collective press release and sent out an email to all partner organizations to inform them of the developments and outcome in Geneva. Partner organizations were asked to report back on their advocacy efforts and invited to give their thoughts on the resolution.

The creation of the open-ended intergovernmental working group to develop an international legally binding instrument is an important step towards deepening accountability for corporations and their home states. The Treaty Alliance and its members are committed to engaging in the activities of this working group to ensure the ultimate outcome is an effective international system capable of providing access to justice for communities affected by corporate human rights violations.