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THE WHITE COMPANY
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Ethical
Trading
Initiative

FNET
FOOD NETWORK FOR ETHICAL TRADE

itf
INTERNATIONAL
TRANSPORT
WORKERS'
FEDERATION

UNISON
the public service union

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL

anti-
slavery

Business and
Human Rights
Centre

Corporate
Justice
Coalition
Protecting rights.
Ending corporate abuse.

FAIRTRADE
DO IT
FAIR

Friends of
the Earth
England, Wales &
Northern Ireland

unseen

21 October 2026

The Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AA

Dear Prime Minister,

Organisations across business, trade unions and civil society call for mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence legislation

Today, people from across the UK are in Westminster, meeting their MPs to demand a law that has been assessed and recommended, but never delivered. We, the undersigned, add our voice to theirs. We are asking your Government to commit, in this session, to introducing mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence (mHREDD) legislation, to ensure that companies doing business here actively prevent harms to workers, communities and the environment in their UK operations and global value chains.

This is a request for one clear UK standard, grounded in the UN Guiding Principles and OECD Guidelines, rather than leaving divergent and separate regimes operating side by side across the UK, EU and other markets. Businesses back this because it would not increase the overall regulatory burden: one standard built on the international framework companies already use costs less than several running in parallel.

Any UK company or public body can source cotton picked through state-imposed forced labour, or cobalt mined by children, or bananas below the cost of production and face little legal accountability at home, while responsible competitors are undercut as a result. mHREDD legislation closes that gap: it creates a level playing field, by rewarding businesses already acting responsibly, and requiring action from those that are not. The same logic applies to the public sector, which procures at scale and can use that purchasing power and leverage to promote social value and shape supplier behaviour across whole sectors.

New research from the Fabian Society reveals that serious labour exploitation and environmental harm in the UK costs around £4.4bn a year, a conservative estimate. By contrast, the research estimates that a new regime requiring businesses to prevent human rights and environmental harms across their value chains would cost around £420m a year - less than 10% of the cost of the harm.

And it is about more than economics. It is about power: workers are injured in factories with poorly enforced safety systems. Rivers are polluted by industrial waste. Too often, the companies responsible are not held to account, while the people affected have little or no access to remedy, and a fractional stake in the value their work creates. These harms occur here in the UK and overseas, in many sectors from agriculture and apparel to care and construction.

Climate change is part of the same picture. Future UK food supplies depend on businesses acting now to help farmers adapt, and the public sees the risk: a recent Fairtrade study found that 84% of British adults are concerned about the impact of climate change on the UK's food supply, with over a

quarter (26%) now much more concerned than before. Due diligence that covers environmental harm is how businesses identify those risks and act on them before their products reach UK shelves.

Voluntary standards have had decades to work but they have not delivered enough on their own, and the legal requirements we do have are not enforced. The Government's figures show that 40% of companies fail to meet basic reporting requirements under Section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act, without consequence. The public no longer believes voluntary approaches work. YouGov polling for Friends of the Earth in October 2025 found that just 8% of UK adults think voluntary agreements are enough to prevent human rights harms by UK companies. Three-quarters (74%) want businesses operating globally to be legally required to prevent those harms, and 60% want the same on global deforestation.

That sits within a wider expectation of this Government: polling for Amnesty International found that four in five people think it important that you do more to protect human rights. Business is with them. Twenty companies, including seven of the UK's major supermarkets and some of the best-known names on the British high street, with a combined turnover of over £130 billion, already back this call, as do the British Retail Consortium, the trade association for UK retail, and B Lab UK, the network for the UK's B Corp businesses. They stand alongside the Ethical Trading Initiative, which brings companies, trade unions and NGOs together to advance human rights in supply chains; trade unions including UNISON and the International Transport Workers' Federation; and expert civil society organisations, including Anti-Slavery International, Fairtrade Foundation and Friends of the Earth, working on human rights, labour rights, development and the environment. Together, we reflect a growing convergence of support for stronger due diligence laws in the UK, echoed by wider business, investors and civil society. The public, business, trade unions and civil society, and a growing body of evidence, all point the same way.

We are asking the Government to introduce mHREDD legislation that:

- Holds all UK businesses legally accountable for failing to take reasonable steps to prevent human rights and environmental harms across their operations and value chains
- Covers all human rights, labour rights and environmental harms comprehensively
- Applies to public and private sector organisations alike, with the scale and scope of due diligence proportionate to an organisation's size, influence and leverage
- Provides access to justice and remedy for survivors and victims of harm
- Aligns with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and OECD Guidelines, and keeps pace with emerging due diligence laws internationally, so that UK business remains globally competitive

This is a policy with a rare, ready-made coalition behind it. Three parliamentary committees have already recommended such legislation, and your own Government has gathered further evidence, through BIST's review of Responsible Business Conduct and the FCDO's National Baseline Assessment of the UK's implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. We urge you to publish both without delay, and to act on the evidence they set out.

We are ready to meet with you or your officials in the coming weeks, to discuss how such legislation can be designed, through meaningful consultation, to be effective for all rightsholders and for business.

Yours sincerely,

This letter was coordinated by the Ethical Trading Initiative, the Corporate Justice Coalition and the British Retal Consortium.

Businesses
A.F. Blakemore & Son Ltd
Aldi UK
ASDA
ASOS
Charles Tyrwhitt
Co-op
Hunter
John Lewis Partnership
Lidl GB
Marks & Spencer
New Look
Princes Group
Sainsbury's
Smallworld Accessories
Superdry & Co
TFG London
The White Company
Tony's Chocolonely
Union Speciality Coffee Roasters
WHSmith

Business networks and multi-stakeholder organisations
B Lab UK
British Retail Consortium
Ethical Trading Initiative
Food Network for Ethical Trade (FNET)

Trade unions
International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF)
UNISON

Civil society organisations
Amnesty International UK
Anti-Slavery International
Business and Human Rights Centre
Corporate Justice Coalition
Fairtrade Foundation
Friends of the Earth England, Wales & Northern Ireland
Unseen

Cc: The Rt Hon Jonathan Reynolds MP, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade; Lord Sarwar, Minister for Trade.