

Lord Peter Mandelson
First Secretary of State, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills,
Lord President of the Council,
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills,
1 Victoria Street,
London SW1H 0ET

30 March 2010

Dear Peter,

I write in my capacity as Chair of the Advisory Board of the newly established, UK based Institute for Human Rights and Business (www.institutehrb.org) to express concern over recent proposals put forward by the Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD) and to offer support in facilitating constructive multi-stakeholder dialogue around this important issue.

Our reading of proposed changes to the ECGD's Business Principles and ancillary policies suggests that a significant number of future transactions supported by ECGD would no longer be subject to environmental, social and human rights due diligence which are presently required. Similar concerns have been raised in recent weeks by a group of respected civil society organisations.

As you are aware, in the area of human rights, current ECGD supported projects are assessed against a number of relevant criteria, in particular with regard to the use of child or bonded labour. The current reform proposals, if approved, could result in any future screening for child and forced labour being entirely discretionary for projects of a certain size and duration. In our view, this would significantly weaken the protection that ECGD currently provides against the abuse of children and bonded labourers in poorer countries.

As an independent organization dedicated to serving as a centre of expertise on the links between international human rights standards and private sector activities, the Institute for Human Rights and Business believes the ECGD should not proceed with its proposed changes concerning its Business Principles without further dialogue and consultation with all relevant stakeholders. Should you find it appropriate, my colleagues and I at the Institute would be pleased to participate in or help facilitate such dialogue. The Institute's Executive Director, John Morrison, will follow up with your office in the coming days to discuss this important matter further.

With my best wishes,



Mary Robinson
Chair, Advisory Board
Institute for Human Rights and Business

CC: Patrick Crawford, Chief Executive, Export Credit Guarantee Department