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## Rights Groups Report to UN on US Human Rights Failure to Hold Corporations Accountable for Human Trafficking, Child Labor, Torture, Murder, Indigenous Rights' Violations

*April 19, 2010, New York* – Human Rights organizations submitted a report to the United Nations in Geneva today on the United States failure to hold corporations, including private government contractors, accountable for human rights abuses ranging from human trafficking to murder.

The United States' compliance with international human rights—as required under the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights treaties--will be reviewed for the first time in November as part of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process undertaken by the UN Human Rights Council. The peer review process is intended to review the degree to which all 192 UN member states have fulfilled their human rights obligations and commitments, as well as identify progress, challenges and areas for improvement. Countries are to be reviewed every four years. The UPR will look specifically at the level of each country's implementation of the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the human rights treaties to which the country is a party, and each country's voluntary pledges and commitments, as well as applicable international law.

As part of this process, human rights organizations can submit reports concerning the U.S. and its human rights record. The Center for Constitutional Rights, EarthRights International, the International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net) and the Western Shoshone Defense Project today submitted a report concerning the U.S. human rights record in the context of business activities. The report examines the degree to which the U.S. is upholding its duties to respect, protect and remedy human rights abuses involving business actors both domestically and abroad.

The report cites numerous examples where private companies have been alleged to be responsible for serious human rights abuses, such as:

- the use of forced labor and child labor by Bridgestone in Liberia;
- human trafficking of Nepali laborers by Kellogg Brown & Root;
- nonconsensual medical experimentation by Pfizer; and
- extrajudicial killings and torture committed by private military contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- complicity in war crimes by Chiquita

The human rights organizations also point out that in many instances there is no adequate recourse or means of redress for such abuses committed by companies which fall under U.S. jurisdiction --itself a human rights failure. The report contains a series of recommendations which, if followed, would bring the U.S. closer to compliance with its human rights obligations.

Said **Julie Cavanaugh-Bill**, Legal Counsel of the Western Shoshone Defense Project, "We believe that this submission on the government's obligations to hold corporations accountable is essential to the overall review on human rights. In Western Shoshone territory and other indigenous areas, the devastating environmental and cultural impacts are often caused directly by corporate activities which come in through government permitting processes."

"The United States must seriously rethink its relationship with private military and security companies, and end its outsourcing of core governmental functions to contractors, particularly in the context of military operations. The Stop Outsourcing Security Act is a good first step in the right direction," said Center for Constitutional Rights attorney **Katherine Gallagher** "Those contractors who have been implicated in serious domestic and international law violations such as torture and murder must be investigated, and where appropriate, prosecuted for their conduct – their status as a government contractor must not be used as a shield to bestow immunity or allow for impunity."

"The Obama administration needs to repudiate the radical anti-human rights approach of the Bush administration with respect to litigation against corporations," said **Marco Simons**, Legal Director of EarthRights International. "Although there are some signs of progress, the United States cannot fulfill its international obligations without embracing remedies for victims of human rights abuses in U.S. courts."

"Human rights require human remedies. Everyday the U.S. extends special protections to private companies from all over the world. Yet, paradoxically, those individuals and communities whose human rights are repeatedly abused by U.S. businesses are often actively denied any possibility to exercise their right to remedy—sent to the door and told to seek justice elsewhere. If the U.S. government is intent on living up to its solemn obligations under human rights law, it must take serious steps now to reverse this tendency to protect corporations over people." Said **Niko Lusiani** of ESCR-Net.