In his letter to the FT, dated 28 January 2011, Arvind Ganesan of Human Rights Watch repeats the earlier Amnesty International claim that the UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights do not “provide meaningful protection against [corporate-related] human rights abuses.”

While AI and others have been busy writing letters justifying their indefensible advice to the UN Human Rights Council, Amnesty UK has been busy “urging” the UK Commons Select Committee on Business, Innovation and Skills to adopt the very proposals that Amnesty’s International Secretariat finds so inadequate.

In paragraph 3.2.1 of their submission, AI-UK informs the Committee that “the UN Special Representative on Business and Human Rights offers the prospect of bringing about a significant improvement in the human rights impacts of companies globally. The UK should promote and support the UN Special Representative’s Guiding Principles when they are presented to the Human Rights Council in June 2011, as this will help create a level playing field on human rights, ensuring that responsible UK companies are not undercut by laggards operating to lower standards.”

One is tempted merely to say, “Amnesty, meet Amnesty.” But important differences between the two positions are worth noting. AI-UK clearly believes that policy is an important instrument for inducing change in the behavior of corporates. In contrast, the AI-Secretariat and Human Rights Watch reiterate their belief that only a binding international treaty will do.

In an FT interview when she was UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour cautioned against this latter approach: “It would be frankly very ambitious to promote only binding norms considering how long this would take and much damage could be done in the meantime”—she was speaking, of course, about damage to victims.

So let AI and HRW hold out the promise to victims that something good may come their way in another generation. My aim, as I have stated explicitly from the beginning, is to reduce corporate-related human rights harm to the maximum extent possible in the shortest possible period of time. And I am doing so primarily by recommending significant changes in policies and practices, on the part of governments and businesses alike.