

UN rights experts stand with businesses protesting Saudi journalist's disappearance

Independent UN human rights experts are praising business leaders who have decided to pull out of a high-level investment conference taking place next week in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, over concern for the fate of dissident Saudi journalist, Jamal Khashoggi.

In a statement issued on Friday by the UN human rights office (OHCHR), Chair of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, Dante Pesce, said the decision by corporations and top executives to withdraw “underlines how companies can use their leverage to address human rights concerns.”

Among those who have reportedly pulled out, are the HSBC banking group, ride-share giant Uber, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Around 30 delegates and firms are said to have withdrawn from the event.

The US Treasury Secretary, and UK International Trade Secretary, have also said they will not be going, though many business sponsors and other companies are still scheduled to attend.

“Business leaders need to take a strong interest in keeping civic space open wherever they operate,” said Mr. Pesce. “It is only in an environment where journalists and human rights defenders are able to speak freely that businesses can effectively identify and prevent negative human rights impacts.”

Mr. Khashoggi was last seen on 2 October, entering the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul, and there is no evidence that he ever left the building.

Other UN rights experts demanded a probe into Mr. Khashoggi's case earlier this week, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has [pressed](#) the Saudi Arabian and Turkish governments to ensure that a prompt, thorough, effective, impartial and transparent investigation takes place.

UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) has repeatedly demanded that the truth be established, and his Spokesperson told reporters on Thursday that the Saudi and Turkish joint investigation needed to play out, before any UN-led international investigation could take place, “if all the parties involved request it, or if there's a legislative mandate from a UN body.”

The Working Group on Business and Human Rights presented a [report](#) to the UN General Assembly earlier this week, which highlighted practical steps businesses need to take to avoid eroding human rights. These principles are echoed in this year's [United Nations Forum on Business and Human Rights](#), and the [United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#).