

Non-governmental organisations as a counterweight

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The demands for transparency and accountability owe much to non-governmental organisations, several of which are established in Geneva or elsewhere in Switzerland. Public Eye, in particular, played a decisive role in the cases described in the previous chapter: its criminal complaint of 2017 lies at the origin of the investigation that led to Glencore's conviction, while its investigations into Gunvor in Congo, published from 2017 onwards, accompanied the proceedings.¹ Its work on the trading of Russian oil in Dubai has documented the circumvention of sanctions.²

These organisations act as a counterweight that the authorities and companies have learned to take into account. They possess investigative capacity, networks in producing countries, access to the media and legitimacy in the eyes of public opinion. Their reports feed criminal proceedings, parliamentary debates and popular initiatives. They also contribute to shaping opinion about the financial centre, both in Switzerland and abroad.

Relations between non-governmental organisations and the sector oscillate between confrontation and dialogue. Companies frequently contest the method and the conclusions of these investigations, yet under their pressure they have adopted transparency commitments and strengthened their compliance programmes. The federal authorities have set up dialogue platforms bringing together the sector, non-governmental organisations and the administration.³ For a financial centre that sells trust, this counterweight is as much a resource as a constraint.

1 Notes

1. Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, "RDC : Glencore condamnée pour corruption par le Ministère public de la Confédération en Suisse" (DRC: Glencore convicted of corruption by

the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland), accessed September 2026; Public Eye, “Gunvor: unprecedented conviction in corruption case”, 17 October 2019. ↩

2. Public Eye, “Russian oil trade: Dubai pulls out all the stops to edge out Switzerland”, 16 November 2023. ↩
3. SECO, “Matières premières” (Commodities) (seco.admin.ch): interdepartmental FDFA-FDF-EAER platform aimed at strengthening “(1) competitiveness and innovation, (2) integrity and sustainability, and (3) the analytical framework, dialogue and coordination between the various interest groups”; FDFA and SECO (mandate to the Institute for Human Rights and Business), The Commodity Trading Sector: Guidance on Implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, Berne, 2018, developed with a multi-stakeholder advisory group comprising Cargill, Glencore, the Swiss Trading and Shipping Association, Bread for All, Public Eye, Swissaid, the canton of Geneva and the federal authorities; SIF, “Négoce des matières premières” (Commodity trading): platform created in 2013, led by the SIF until March 2025 and thereafter by SECO. ↩

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