

# **UN Forum on Business and Human Rights**

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**Session: *The Role of the UN System:  
Making the Most of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights***

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The United Nations Global Compact's mandate from the UN General Assembly, refreshed in December last year, is to advance UN values and responsible business practices within the UN system and among the global business community. In a nutshell, we advocate that business do no harm, make a difference, and work with others.

If we count the UN Global Compact's labour principles as human rights, six of the ten UN Global Compact principles, derived from international Conventions and Declarations, and recognized by the UN General Assembly, concern human rights.

Corporate respect and support for human rights is the UN Global Compact's first principle. A note co-published with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights available at this conference

([http://www.unglobalcompact.org/docs/issues\\_doc/human\\_rights/Resources/GPs\\_GC%20note.pdf](http://www.unglobalcompact.org/docs/issues_doc/human_rights/Resources/GPs_GC%20note.pdf)) explains the complementarity of the Guiding Principles and the UN Global Compact. Its key message is that the corporate responsibility to respect human rights in the UN Global Compact is the same corporate responsibility to respect human rights found in the Guiding Principles.

In line with the UN General Assembly (e.g., A/RES/66/223) and UN Secretary-General's recognition of the positive role that business can play to help drive sustainable development, the UN Global Compact reinforces this minimum requirement, while also going beyond the Guiding Principles in encouraging business to explore opportunities to take additional voluntary actions whether core business, strategic social investment and philanthropy, public policy engagement and advocacy or partnership and other forms of collective action to also contribute to social development.

This support for human rights is as a voluntary complement and not substitute for the requirement of respect for human rights, which applies to all businesses whether or not they are in the UN Global Compact.

More than 7000 UN Global Compact business participants in 140 countries have explicitly acknowledged their responsibility to respect human rights (the second pillar of the Guiding Principles) and committed to support human rights, and to report progress to their own stakeholders on at least an annual basis. The total number of signatories is around 10,000.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has set the goal of 20,000 participants by 2020.

Since the UN Global Compact began over 12 years ago, the Global Compact Office has worked closely with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and with other partners on the business and human rights agenda. Together, we have developed and promoted tools and guidance materials ranging from an overarching human rights management framework; an online training with a certificate; how to develop a human rights policy; how to conduct a human rights impact assessment; and how to report on respect and support for human rights. We have also actively promoted robust and user friendly tools and guidance developed by other organizations. We don't suffer from "Not invented here."

We have had a multi-stakeholder Human Rights Working Group ([http://www.unglobalcompact.org/Issues/human\\_rights/Human\\_Rights\\_Working\\_Group.html](http://www.unglobalcompact.org/Issues/human_rights/Human_Rights_Working_Group.html)) under the auspices of the Global Compact Board for many years. The UN Global Compact Office is the Secretariat for the group together with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Since the Guiding Principles were endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council, the Working Group has made promoting the Guiding Principles and their implementation one of its top objectives. Beyond tools and guidance, the Working Group focuses on good practice development and dissemination through good practice notes, peer reviewed case studies, and an online dilemmas forum (<http://human-rights.unglobalcompact.org>) developed with Maplecroft. The Working Group also periodically engages in collective action, and has prioritized support for Local Networks and special initiatives that flesh out the corporate responsibility to respect and support human rights.

Some of these special initiatives entail working closely with other UN agencies, including UN Women and UNICEF, on what the UN Global Compact means as regards specific stakeholder groups and on ways their UN mandates can be advanced by working more systematically with the private sector, beyond partnerships, to engage the private sector on corporate responsibility and sustainability.

The outputs, to which members of the Human Rights Working Group have also contributed, have included the Women's Empowerment Principles and the Children's Rights and Business Principles. We have also been working with the UN's Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on a draft business guide to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, illustrated with practical examples, which will be released as an exposure draft on 10 December for a multi-month consultation. We are currently exploring undertaking a similar exercise for a Business Guide to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

More generally, we work across the UN System through the UN private sector focal point network and <http://business.un.org> to promote responsible business practices, including on human rights.

An opportunity we see and have been actively pursuing is an integrated approach to human rights that recognizes respect for human rights as an essential dimension of sustainability. This enables us to promote human rights in corporate sustainability and sustainable development contexts. We see the post-2015 development process for what is to succeed the Millennium Development Goals as an important opportunity for business and human rights. We have been given the role of providing the official business contribution to the UN Secretary-General for this process and will be reaching out to gather input.

Some challenges are the need for more practical material in languages other than English and to go beyond the usual suspects and effectively engage new business audiences around the globe, including smaller businesses. UN Global Compact Local Networks in 101 countries are one key to addressing such challenges. We are thrilled to have at this conference a number of representatives from these Local Networks and hope at least some of you caught our new audiences session with some Local Networks yesterday.

A number of Local Networks have established their own country level human rights working groups and/or are working on tools to help companies in their countries know how to know and show respect and support for human rights. We encourage the companies and other organizations present at this conference to support and engage in these country networks to help bolster local capacity. As an example, don't miss the Getting Started on Human Rights tool developed by the German Network. You can see it at their booth here.

We have been doing a huge amount to promote respect and support for human rights inside and outside the UN. If we had more capacity, we could do even more to keep up with growing demand. To get really specific for a moment we would like to add another technical expert to our human rights team to help us with integration, in case there are any governments or other organizations out there that would be interested to support us with this.

In summary, we are calling for combining compliance with innovation and shared value creation, more technical resources, simple messages to help reach new audiences and better support SMEs, more local engagement and collaboration including in the context of Local Networks, translations, and exploring opportunities for further integration in the corporate sustainability and sustainable development agendas. We would be happy to share our submission to the Secretary-General's report with anyone who is interested.

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