

*Statement by the United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights**

Time for the G20 to act on commitments and step up leadership on business and human rights

As the G20 countries prepare to convene for their Summit and Ministerial meeting in Osaka, Japan on 28-29 June 2019, the [United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights](#) (Working Group), calls on them to fulfil their commitments and demonstrate action and leadership to fully implement the [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights for implementing the United Nations “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework](#).

The Working Group’s mandate addresses the fundamental question of how to achieve a sustainable global economy in which the human rights of all are protected and respected. This is one of the key issues of our time, and the one which the G20 has previously addressed in 2017 in the context of promotion of sustainable global supply chains. Global supply chains have contributed positively to economic development and progress in helping people realize a range of economic and social rights. At the same time, a wide range of serious human rights abuses have been linked to global supply chains across all sectors in all world regions. This issue requires urgent and sustained attention by all Government leaders. They should look to the growing number of companies and investors who recognize that doing the right thing is also the smart thing: safeguarding people is a prerequisite for sustainable development and stable societies, and it is also good for business.

When G20 leaders at the summit in 2017 committed to promote sustainable and inclusive supply chains through promoting implementation of the UN Guiding Principles, we [welcomed](#) this step. The 2017 leaders’ declaration demonstrated commitment to show leadership in this area, and at the time we were encouraged to see the intention to advance implementation of the UN Guiding Principles through national action plans on business and human rights and by ensuring access to remedy for victims of human rights abuse in global supply chains. However, as these aspirations were not reflected in the 2018 outcomes, **we would like to know how the G20 countries are acting on the promising commitments made in 2017.**

[We wrote to the G20 prior to the 2017 summit](#), where we set out several recommendations on the steps G20 countries could take to strengthen implementation of the UN Guiding Principles. We think that those recommendations still apply. Moreover, we would like to draw attention to [the Working Group’s report to the 2018 UN General Assembly where we addressed the state of play for corporate “human rights due diligence”](#) – a key concept set out by the Guiding Principles (and elaborated on in the 2018 OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct) on how businesses should identify, prevent, mitigate and remediate adverse impacts on people arising in the context of their operations and value chains.

In the 2018 report, we set out several recommendations to States, and we call on G20 leaders to integrate these in action frameworks. **The Working Group recommends that States use all available levers to address market failures and governance gaps to advance corporate human rights due diligence as part of standard business practice, ensuring alignment with the Guiding Principles**, including by:

(a) Using legislation to create incentives to exercise human rights due diligence, including through mandatory requirements, while taking into account elements to drive effective implementation by

businesses and promote level playing fields; (b) using [their role as economic actors](#) to advance human rights due diligence, including by integrating human rights due diligence into the operations of [State-owned enterprises](#) and agencies that promote trade and investment (“[economic diplomacy](#)”), and into public procurement; (c) integrate a [gender perspective](#) in implementing the UN Guiding Principles, including human rights due diligence; (d) promoting greater policy coherence within Governments, including by adopting or strengthening the implementation of [national action plans](#) on business and human rights; (e) providing guidance to business enterprises, including small and medium-sized enterprises, on human rights due diligence tailored to local contexts; (f) strengthening access to remedy and corporate accountability, and facilitating multi-stakeholder platforms to promote dialogue on addressing business-related risks to human rights; and (g) recognizing the key role of [human rights defenders](#) in enabling companies to understand concerns of affected stakeholders and in conducting human rights due diligence, and ensuring that the legitimate activities of human rights defenders are not obstructed.

Another key issue that we would like to emphasize is the importance of improving policy coherence between business-oriented arms of Governments and States’ international human rights obligations. In this context, we would like to stress that the UN Guiding Principles do apply to, and should be integrated in, policy areas that have been high on G20 countries’ agenda, including: [achieving sustainable development](#); infrastructure development; artificial intelligence; “gig economy” and “future of work”; transition to a green economy; [addressing conflict and post-conflict situations](#); rights of migrant workers; and [empowerment of women and gender equality](#).

All Governments should proactively prevent and address harms to people in the context of these key global issues. We would encourage States to engage with civil society organizations working on such issues – including by considering previous and present recommendations of the Civil 20 (C20) group of civil society organizations – as well as business organizations and companies committed to implementing the UN Guiding Principles.

Finally, our overall recommendation to G20 members would be to reiterate their commitment to the UN Guiding Principles and clarify how the commitments made in 2017 are being turned into action. The Working Group would also like to encourage effective implementation and follow-up of commitments. For example, individual G20 countries may publish periodic implementation updates. In this vein, we would like to **invite the Governments in charge of the G20 Presidency from 2017 through 2020 to participate in the 2019 UN Forum on Business and Human Rights (Geneva, 25-27 November) and present how the commitments are being acted upon.** The theme of the 2019 UN Forum is “[Time to act: Governments as catalysts for business respect for human rights](#)”, with focus on the need for all Governments to demonstrate progress, commitments and plans in implementing the State duty to protect and strengthening corporate accountability.

The G20 is uniquely positioned to address current gaps and challenges to realizing effective protection of and respect for human rights in the global economy. This is needed to secure sustainable global supply chains and a sustainable future for all. We urge G20 leaders to recognize this [connection between UN Guiding Principles and the Sustainable Development Goals](#), and to keep this issue on top of their agenda.

Endnote

**) The Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises (known as the Working Group on Business and Human Rights) is mandated by the Human Rights Council to promote worldwide dissemination and implementation of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (resolutions 17/4, 26/22, and 35/7). The Working Group is composed of five independent experts, of balanced geographical representation, and it is part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures mandate-holders are independent human rights experts appointed by the Human Rights Council to address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. The experts are not UN staff and are independent from any government or organization. They serve in their individual capacity and do not receive a salary for their work.*