

3rd UN South Asia Forum on Business and Human Rights
28-30 March 2022

Concept Note

Background

The [UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights](#) (UNWG) launched its [Roadmap for the next decade of business and human rights \(UNGPs 10+ Roadmap\)](#) in November 2021. The Roadmap was informed by an exercise conducted by the UNWG [taking stock](#) of implementation of the [United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) (UNGPs) between 2011 and 2021. The Roadmap lays out key priorities for the next decade. It provides key action areas for the road ahead for States, businesses and other stakeholders to progressively realise business respect for human rights and access to an effective remedy more effectively and more widely.

In South Asia, one could observe some promising business and human rights developments since the [2nd UN South Asia Forum on Business and Human Rights](#) held in March 2021. For example, Pakistan formally adopted a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (NAP) in September 2021. Moreover, India is likely to adopt its NAP in 2022, while Nepal has formally committed to developing a NAP.

Nevertheless, South Asia continues to face a wide range of systemic challenges that obstruct business respect for human rights and undermine sustainable development. For example, the devastating social and economic impacts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to plague the sub-region in the near future. In addition, widening inequalities continue to drive social divides and disproportionately impact on the most discriminated and marginalised individuals and communities in society. The challenge of shrinking civic space adds to the impacts faced by rights holders, including human rights defenders and youth activists, and diminishes prospects of access to effective remedy. Similarly, governments and businesses across the sub-region are yet to address worsening environmental crises. Indeed, climate change, environmental destruction, and biodiversity loss are projected to negatively transform the lives of people across South Asia and require interventions and just transitions of an unprecedented scale.

Adding to this extensive yet non-exhaustive list of challenges is the issue of business-related human rights abuses in the informal economy. As more than 80% of workers and over 90% of South Asia's businesses operate in the informal economy, human rights issues linked to informality cannot be overlooked. Indeed, governments and businesses must close protection gaps in the informal economy. Thus, the question remains how UNGPs' implementation by governments and predominately large corporations can support micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and ultimately enhance protection and respect of workers' rights in the informal economy.

To address these challenges, ensure just transitions and rights-based COVID-19 recovery, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is imperative to mainstream business respect for human rights and strengthen corporate accountability for human rights abuses. International instruments such as the UNGPs and the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration) can guide all types of actors in this regard.

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Against this context, the UNWG and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO), are organising the 3rd UN South Asia Forum on Business and Human Rights on 28-30 March 2022. The Forum aims to facilitate a robust and multi-stakeholder dialogue that will foster joint action to prevent, mitigate and remediate business-related human rights abuses and advance the decent work agenda in South Asia.

The Forum will build on the [2nd UN South Asia Forum on Business and Human Rights](#), which was organised virtually on 17-19 March 2021 and brought together 1,500 participants from 89 countries. The 2021 Forum featured country-specific sessions to assess challenges and opportunities in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Stakeholders participating in these sessions elaborated national roadmaps to promote business respect for human rights. All of these sessions concluded that there is an urgent need to enforce existing human rights standards, including labour and environmental laws in order to eliminate the most serious abuses, including child and forced labour, to address specific business-related human rights challenges in the informal economy, to support businesses mainstreaming human rights due diligence throughout their operations, and to ensure access to effective remedy for victims. In addition to discussing thematic challenges and opportunities common to the entire sub-region, the 2022 Forum will provide space for country-specific dialogue and follow up, including on the business and human rights country- roadmaps outlined in 2021.

Objectives

- To assess sub-regional progress, challenges and opportunities in implementing the UNWG's Roadmap for the next decade of business and human rights and the country roadmaps outlined at the 2nd UN South Asia Forum on Business and Human Rights;
- To explore linkages between business and human rights, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and issues such as climate change and COVID-19 recovery;
- To encourage peer-learning amongst governments, national employers' organisations, trade unions, national human rights institutions (NHRIs), businesses and civil society organisations (CSOs) in South Asia, facilitating the regional exchange of good practices in implementing the UNGPs and the MNE Declaration and contributing to achieving the SDGs;
- To provide safe spaces to CSOs, trade unions, businesses, and NHRIs, enabling open discussions about challenges faced by respective actors.

Programme

The programme of the 3rd UN South Asia Forum will be developed in consultation with the relevant stakeholders. The following is a tentative list of topics or sessions that the organisers envisage featuring in the programme.

- Country sessions for Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka;
- Safe space sessions for CSOs, trade unions, businesses, and NHRIs;
- Developing, implementing and monitoring national action plans on business and human rights;
- Raising awareness of business and human right standards and challenges among businesses, including MSMEs;
- Addressing business-related human rights abuses in the informal economy;
- The role of CSOs, human rights defenders, trade unions, business associations, NHRIs, academia, journalists, young people and others in promoting business respect for human rights;
- Connecting business and human rights with other social movements, including youth-led movements
- Achieving policy coherence between human rights and international trade and investment;
- Linkages between the business and human rights, environment, climate change, sustainable development, COVID-19 recovery, just transitions, conflict and related topics;
- Protecting and respecting the rights of migrant workers, women, children, and Indigenous Peoples;
- Mandatory business and human rights legislation, including concerning human rights due diligence;
- Improving access to effective remedy through judicial and non-judicial mechanisms.

Format

The 3rd UN South Asia Forum will be organised in Dhaka, Bangladesh in a hybrid format over three days: 28-30 March 2022. Safe space sessions, which will be held under the Chatham House Rule and aim to facilitate conversation among specific stakeholder groups, will be organised on 28 March before the Forum's official opening on 29 March.

In addition, there will be some space for external partners to organise side events, workshops, consultations or meetings during the Forum. Those who are interested in organising such events should indicate their interest with a one-page concept note outlining the title, background, objectives, format, and proposed speakers latest by 9 February 2022.

A draft program of the Forum will be available in early March 2022. All the sessions will be live-streamed. Participants will be informed on how to join sessions after they have registered for the Forum.

Queries related to program, sessions, speakers, participation, side events, etc:

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