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Annual Forum on Business and Human Rights

Opening Session



**UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS**
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

**Welcome statement by Ms. Laura Dupuy Lasserre,
President of the Human Rights Council**

**4 December 2012 at 10.00
Palais des Nations Room XX**

Honourable Chair,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Working Group members,

Distinguished delegates and participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to be opening the first annual Forum on Business and Human Rights this morning.

First I would like to offer a warm welcome to Professor John Ruggie, former Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises, who has accepted the important task of being the chair of the first annual Forum.

I would also like to extend a warm welcome to the members of the Working Group on human rights and transnational corporations, and to all the distinguished participants of this high level opening session coming from all sectors, including trade unions, business associations and affected stakeholders and communities, to share their first hand experiences and perspectives.

This participation highlights the importance of this forum, which is a valuable opportunity to interact with Member States and other stakeholders on human rights issues.

Mr. President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Through its Special Procedure mandates, the Human Rights Council has been leading the international community's work on the business and human rights agenda for almost 10 years. In June 2011, the Council adopted by consensus the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights drafted by the former Special Representative, Professor Ruggie and decided to create, as follow up mechanisms for their implementation, a working group and this annual forum.

Currently, the Council is expanding its work on business and human rights to include a particular focus on the role of the UN system in advancing the business and human rights agenda, particularly the comprehensive and effective implementation of the Guiding Principles. At its most recent session, last September, the Council welcomed recommendations from the Secretary-General on the strategic approach of the UN to mainstream business and human rights and the role of particular agencies and programmes in this regard. The Council has requested the Secretary-General to report on progress in implementing these recommendations by 2014.

In addition, the Council decided to hold a high level panel in June 2013, with representatives of relevant UN programs, funds, and agencies to discuss strategies to advance the business and human rights agenda.

Distinguished participants,

This annual Forum offers a unique opportunity for the international community to bring together all relevant stakeholders to the business and human rights debate to exchange information, challenges, good practices and lessons learned with regard to implementing the Guiding Principles.

The overwhelming interest in the Forum – witness the unforeseen turnout here today of some 900 accredited participants - is testament to the significant interest in the issue. The Council is grateful to the Working Group for guiding the preparations of the Forum and looks forward to learn how the deliberations will inform the Working Group as it moves forward in implementing its mandate. The balanced approach of focusing on all three pillars of the Guiding Principles, as well as the geographical and gender balance in the composition of the various panels are to be welcomed, and they provide with an opportunity to discuss on multiple topics.

I am also grateful to the donors and partners as they enabled the participation in the proceedings of a large number of civil society representatives as well as other stakeholders. These voices from the ground are essential to ensuring that deliberations are informed by the practical experience of all actors, presenting good practices that could also be adapted to other situations.

I wish you successful and rewarding substantive and action-oriented discussions.

Thank you very much for your attention.