

ILO

Sandra Polaski

UNITED NATIONS FORUM ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

*High-level segment: From Principles to Practice: How can the global community ensure business respect for human rights?*

Ms. President of the Human Rights Council (Ms. Laura Dupuy Lasserre)

Mr. Chairperson of the Forum (Professor John Ruggie)

Mr. Chairperson of the Working Group on Business and Human Rights (Dr. Puvan Selvanathan)

Excellencies, colleagues, friends,

This Forum is an important milestone in the work that the Human Rights Council has been steering on the issue of business and human rights. It is the next step in a remarkable journey for the human rights community, for business and for governments with the active participation of so many stakeholders.

I would like to thank the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Members of the Working Group on Business and Human Rights, for inviting the ILO to speak at this opening session. It is an important opportunity for the UN and the ILO to highlight our complementary efforts in advancing the respect for human rights by all actors in society.

The inclusion in the Framework and Guiding Principles of the ILO fundamental principles and rights at work, alongside the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the two covenants, as the normative list of human rights that business should respect is a strong and welcome foundation.

Two years ago Professor Ruggie was a guest at the ILO's International Labour Conference for a dialogue with the ILO constituents in government, business and labor on the Framework and the Guiding Principles. Professor Ruggie recognized that the ILO has been working to advance the human rights of workers since its

creation in 1919 with the constitutional mandate to work to achieve social justice. The ILO sets labour standards through negotiations involving governments, business and trade unions and has a supervisory system that monitors application of those standards, a system that has been working and producing results for almost 90 years.

Today we are here to translate “Principles to Practice” and address how the global community can ensure business respect for human rights”. Let me highlight how the ILO—together with its tripartite constituents in governments, employers’ organizations and trade unions—can further contribute to strengthening respect for human rights. To do this, I would like to quote the UN Secretary General’s report to the Human Rights Council last September.

The Secretary General said, “In particular, the International Labour Organization works with States, business enterprises and trade unions to promote and monitor the implementation of international labour standards that are part of the normative content of the Guiding Principles.”

The Secretary General went on to say, “Importantly, the ILO follows up on the ratification of conventions by building the capacity of Governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations on international labour standards. It also provides enterprises with direct guidance on how to respect labour-related human rights through its Helpdesk for Business and through business-related networks.”

Finally, the Secretary General called for close collaboration between our organizations: “There is scope,” he said, “for increased collaboration and

coordination between ILO, United Nations human rights bodies and OHCHR to ensure alignment between implementation of international labour standards and efforts aimed at promoting the implementation of the Guiding Principles. The tripartite structure of the ILO provides important channels to reinforce efforts involving States, business and trade unions to promote implementation of the Guiding Principles. Collaboration could also include reciprocal efforts to coordinate work at the country level and to establish relations with a broader constituency.”

We welcome this clear recognition of the inter-related and complementary work of the ILO, the OHCHR, the Human Rights Council and the Working group on business and human rights. We will work together with these bodies to ensure full alignment between the implementation of the ILO labour standards and the efforts to implement the Guiding Principles.

At the same time the tripartite constituents of the ILO—governments, business and labour—stress that the ILO’s unique mandate to set and supervise the application of labour standards and the fundamental principles and rights at work should be fully recognized and respected by other international initiatives and frameworks that refer to these standards and rights. For example, businesses organized in the International Organization of Employers, the International Chamber of Commerce and the Business Advisory Council to the OECD have noted that in the promotion of the Guiding Principles “the roles and responsibilities of the different UN agencies are respected” . . . and that “the

leading role of the ILO regarding all labour and social issues must be fully recognized”.

We want to bring this mandate and expertise to bear in deepening and extending partnerships within the UN system, including with UN agencies, funds and programmes promoting human rights; by strengthening the integration of the fundamental principles and rights in the UN Development Assistance Frameworks, when appropriate; and by cooperating more closely with relevant multilateral organizations to promote a better coordination between their programmes and activities with respect to rights at work and those of the ILO. At the same time, we want to share our experience and learning in promoting rights through partnerships with business, for example in working to eliminate the worst forms of child labor in the cocoa industry through our International Programme to Eliminate Child Labor and working with firms in the garment sector to improve both respect for rights at work and to increase productivity through our Better Work Programme.

It is through such collaboration and joint efforts that we will together advance respect for rights at work and the full enjoyment of human rights by all working women and men, their families and communities around the world. We look forward to increased partnership between our organizations and with all stakeholders present here to make respect for human rights a universal and standard part of doing business.

Thank you.