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Speaking Notes

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*Developing an Agenda for Comprehensive Capacity Building on Implementation
of the Guiding Principles*

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Introduction

Professor Redmond, distinguished panelists and delegates,

I am pleased to address you this afternoon on behalf of the Canadian Human Rights Commission in its capacity as Chair and Americas regional member of the Working Group on Business and Human Rights of the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights or 'ICC'.

I wish to express our appreciation to Professor Paul Redmond for facilitating this session and to my fellow panelists for their obvious interest and engagement in advancing the Guiding Principles. I am also certain that Forum delegates are recognizing the tireless efforts of the UN Working Group and of the OHCHR for organizing a first-rate Forum on Business and Human Rights.

NHRIs - Business and Human Rights

The ICC is the international umbrella association for over 100 national human rights institutions worldwide.

Paris Principle-compliant National Human Rights Institutions, or NHRIs, are independent expert human rights bodies established by national law or Constitution. NHRIs have an ongoing, legal mandate to promote and protect human rights. They are distinct and independent from Government and non-governmental organizations.

NHRIs have been dealing with public and private sectors on business and human rights through their domestic mandates -through monitoring, complaint handling, advocacy and public education - for decades.

The *UN Paris Principles* for instance state that:

“A national institution shall,...assist in the formulation of programmes for the teaching of, and research into, human rights and to take part in their execution in schools, universities and professional circles;and to publicize human rights and efforts to combat all forms of discrimination, in particular racial discrimination, by increasing public awareness, especially through information and education and by making use of all press organs.” (PP 3 f, g)

The central roles of NHRIs have been recognized across all three pillars of the UN *Protect, Respect, Remedy* Framework and in subsequent UN Resolutions.

Recently, for instance, the UN Secretary General Report on the *Contribution of the UN system as a whole to the advancement of the BHR agenda* identified national human rights institutions as a

“key constituency in supporting the Guiding Principles, resolving business-related human rights disputes and as conveners and facilitators of multi-stakeholder dialogue at the national level” (paragraph 67), and,

spoke of “advancing the business and human rights agenda [including by] supporting the capacity of national institutions to monitor policy coherence, the implementation of the Guiding Principles and the individuals and communities seeking effective remedies, undertaking research related to due diligence, and supporting the development of dispute resolution capacities. (paragraph 44)

NHRIs – Capacity Building

The ICC Working Group on Business and Human Rights or ‘BHR’, created in 2009 as the first thematic working group of the ICC, has the overriding goal to strengthen NHRI capacity in promoting and protecting human rights in relation to business activity in accordance with their UN *Paris Principles* mandates.

The ICC Working Group’s Strategic Action Plan is our blueprint for action and focuses on strategic planning, capacity building and resource sharing, and agenda setting and outreach.

Some of our current priorities are to:

1. provide guidance and tools to NHRIs on Business and Human Rights;
2. engage with stakeholders on human rights and the role of NHRIs in implementing international and regional initiatives in Business and Human Rights;
3. produce and deliver awareness and outreach activities and products; and
4. develop, pilot, implement and evaluate regional training and tools in collaboration with regional networks.

To this end, we are presently:

- engaging with key stakeholders, including the UN Human Rights Council, OHCHR, OECD, UN Global Compact, businesses, civil society and others;
- promoting awareness and development of NHRI training in Business and Human Rights, such as that being led by the Danish Institute for Human Rights on behalf of the ICC Working Group and that of the Francophone Association of NHRIs, among others;

- organising side events such as the side event on Women's and Children's Rights that was held on the sidelines of the 11th biennial conference in Jordan last month;
- populating the ICC website with best practices and resources for the NHRI community relating to BHR; and
- finalizing fact sheets for national institutions on priority themes and relationships associated with NHRI roles in Business and Human Rights.

CHRC - Capacity Building

At home, the Canadian Human Rights Commission is deeply involved with capacity building by working with federally-regulated public and private sector organizations to build self-sustaining human rights cultures to the benefit of everyone including rights holders. One of the ways we are doing this is with our innovative tool, the Human Rights Maturity Model or HRMM.

The HRMM is at once a human rights impact assessment and a capacity building tool. It provides concrete and measurable steps for organizations to not only identify and comply with domestic human rights legislation, but also to foster and sustain a respectful human rights culture.

The HRMM is already being implemented in 45 organizations across Canada. This represents a potential impact on more than 375,000 employees and the services they provide for Canadians.

With organizations embracing the benefits of fostering a respectful and inclusive workplace, we are moving beyond telling employers why they should protect human rights and are taking the steps to show them how. This is directly in line with our commitment to the Guiding Principles.

Looking Ahead- Challenges and Opportunities

A definite consensus is emerging around the world as to the importance of the UN Framework and Guiding Principles. It is now time to turn the same attention to the capacity building required to give them effect in practice.

Immediate opportunities exist, for instance, to integrate human rights modules into academic courses on corporate social responsibility and related issues.

Leveraging existing networks, such as the ICC or UN Global Compact Local Networks, can provide for unique entry points and meaningful opportunities.

Additional challenges and opportunities relating to the implementation of the Guiding Principles are identified in a submission the ICC presented earlier this year to the UN Working Group; after having canvassed NHRIs worldwide. Our recommendations range from building upon existing structures, networks and partnerships – including those among businesses – to increase coherence and consistency among efforts, through to providing for ongoing, transparent communications tools that extend beyond this Forum, such as the internet portal of our co-panelist from the BHRRC.

Conclusion

To conclude, I invite all participants in the room and beyond to look closely at how the ICC and NHRIs, given their ongoing domestic mandates, can play a role in your education and capacity-building activities to tackle the adverse human rights impacts of business activity. Thank you.