

Human Rights & Business

Country Portal Side Event

The Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR), with support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), will launch the Human Rights and Business Country Portal, the first free resource for companies to comprehensively identify and manage the human rights impacts of their operations around the world. This proposal seeks to launch the Country Portal in a 90-minute side event at the Annual Forum on human rights and business in Geneva.

The Human Rights and Business Country Portal is a free website for companies to identify, assess and address their human rights impacts around the world. It provides country- and sector-specific information about the human rights impacts of businesses, alongside concrete recommendations for preventing and mitigating adverse impacts. The Country Portal emphasizes multi-stakeholder engagement and dialogue through which human rights due diligence recommendations are developed and key multi-stakeholder initiatives identified. The Country Portal will launch with 20 countries around the world and cover 40 by 2016.

UN Guiding Principles and the Country Portal

Understanding the local context in which companies do business is the single most important starting point for companies to get human rights right. The key aim of the Human Rights and Business Country Portal is to provide this information for free and in a language that companies can relate to. In line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the Country Portal covers the full spectrum of human rights and aims to engage businesses of all sizes and sectors in taking up the corporate responsibility to respect human rights.

Yet the Country Portal is more than a tool for companies. The Guiding Principles have clarified the respective roles of government and business and the Country Portal can help all actors operationalize these principles in a national context. "The Portal provides information that can be used by all stakeholders—businesses, civil society, government, labour and communities—to dialogue on how business negatively affects human rights and possible solutions," said Mutuso Dhliwayo, director of the Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA), the Country Portal partner in Zimbabwe.

Launch Side Event

To ensure widespread reach, DIHR proposes launching the Country Portal as a side event to the Annual Forum. The side event will have two main objectives: introduce participants to the Human Rights and Business Country Portal; and build the capacity of participants on the UNGPs.

To achieve these objectives, the Portal team will present the Country Portal website and methodology while showcasing best practice examples of the UNGPs in action across Country Portal countries. This will provide participants with real world examples from their regions on how to implement the UNGPs. Further, to ensure the side event is interactive, participants will be asked to provide best practice examples of the UNGPs in action in their home countries, enabling them to reflect on the material covered in their own contexts.

The UNGPs presentation will be based on the Country Portal's pilot project, "Pillars in Practice", jointly implemented by DIHR and Social Accountability International (SAI) in Bangladesh, Nicaragua and Zimbabwe. "Pillars in Practice" seeks to provide local stakeholders in each of these countries with practical knowledge and tools to apply the UN's "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework to real-world contexts.

A multi-stakeholder panel business, state actors and civil society representatives from a number of Portal countries will follow the presentation. Panellists will speak about how the Country Portal can be used as a tool to further the human rights and business agenda in local contexts and contribute to the implementation of the UNGPs. The tentative list of panellists includes:

- Denmark: Danish Institute for Human Rights (state)
- Nicaragua: El Viejo (agriculture sector)
- Serbia: Belgrade Centre for Human Rights (local civil society partner)
- Zimbabwe: Zimplats (mining sector)
- Zimbabwe: Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (local civil society partner)
- International: UNDP Latin America (state)
- Multi-national: Barrick Gold (mining sector)

The panel discussion will be followed by a question and answer session where participants may ask questions directed as panellists and DIHR. Laptop computers will also be made available to enable participants to explore the Country Portal website and learn about local partners around the world.

Forum participants from all stakeholder groups will be invited to participate in the side event. DIHR believes that businesses, governments, civil society and trade unions share a vision where companies contribute to the sustainable development around the world. The Human Rights and Business Country Portal website is a step toward that vision.

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