



Parallel sessions led by external organizations – Guidance for session organizers and moderators

Parallel sessions led by external organizations accredited to the annual Forum on Business and Human Rights have become a regular feature of the event, in line with its open and inclusive nature. The 2015 Forum includes a number of parallel sessions organized by a range of stakeholders and covering a diverse array of themes and topics linked to the mandate of the Forum and the overall theme for the event.

All organizers of parallel sessions at the annual Forum are requested to show consideration for the mandate of the Forum to promote dialogue and cooperation on issues linked to business and human rights and the implementation of the [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#). Parallel session organizers have an important role to play in stimulating respectful dialogue and a participatory approach in the sessions of which they are in charge. This does not mean avoiding contentious topics, reducing divergent views or censoring inputs, but rather taking extra care to create a space for meaningful multi-stakeholder engagement. With this in mind, the Working Group has developed the guidance below for session organizers and moderators.

A. Guidance for session organizers

1. Basic expectations

Parallel session organizers are requested to take the following into account:

- Panels should be moderated in an **interactive fashion to avoid single speaker and lengthy presentations**;
- The organizers should plan for **sufficient time for interaction** between panel speakers and the audience; this includes limiting the size of the panel and time for introductory remarks;
- Panels should allow for **multi-stakeholder participation** to the greatest extent possible.
- **If panel presentations are expected to address specific cases** involving named States and/or enterprises and/or non-governmental organizations, session organizers should inform the Forum secretariat and relevant parties (namely, the Permanent Mission of the State and the companies and the non-governmental organizations concerned) in due course before the opening of the Forum, and seek to involve them in the session;

- Moderators and panel organizers should communicate the content of the present note to panellists participating in their session in due course before the session of the Forum, and ensure that the content is acknowledged and has been understood.

2. Support for session organizers to facilitate multi-stakeholder engagement

The Forum secretariat stands ready to support session organizers in the planning of sessions. For example, one particular challenge that civil society actors faced in past years was finding business speakers, and vice-versa. The secretariat disposes of mechanisms that can be used to assist organizers when addressing challenges of this type

3. Timeline and administrative information

Organizers should prepare a final concept note for the session and submit it to the Forum secretariat for posting on the Forum webpage by the deadline indicated.

The United Nations is not able to cover travel and participation costs of speakers and other persons involved in the session, or to arrange interpretation services for the event. Session organizers are welcome to make arrangements for interpretation and for providing refreshments to participants at their respective events.

All participants in parallel sessions, including organizers and speakers, must register online using the form available on the Forum website.

Following the Forum, session organizers are requested to prepare a brief summary of the discussions and send to the Forum Secretariat within three weeks after the Forum.

B. Guidance for moderators

The aim of the Forum is not only frank and respectful dialogue, but also dynamic and substantively focused discussion. Session moderators have an important role in helping to achieve such an outcome.

When selecting moderators, session organizers should consider whether candidates have any prior relationship with panellists or can take the time to establish this in the lead-up to the Forum. They should also consider whether they have (a) an understanding of the content of the session, and (b) a proven track record in supporting dialogue that values diverse opinions.

Session moderators are expected to assist with the following:

- **Facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogue:** Moderators may want to emphasize the unique multi-stakeholder character of the Forum and that all participants in the audience participate on an equal footing.
- **Acting as stewards:** Moderators are encouraged to embrace the neutral role of being the steward or guide for the conversation based on (a) what panellists and participants express as important and (b) the overall intent of the Forum.
- **Constructive dialogue:** Moderators should ensure that discussions do not focus on one single case, specific company, organization or country. In situations where speakers refer to allegations against specific entities (for example, Governments, individual companies or non-governmental organizations), moderators should ensure that the latter, if present and requesting the floor, are given the right of reply during the session. In such instances,

moderators should remind all participants about the overall principles guiding the Forum, namely, that of constructive dialogue and respect for each other's viewpoint, and encourage participants to abide by those principles.

- **Balanced and pertinent discussions:** Moderators may use their discretion in the management of the interventions from the floor in order to achieve participatory and balanced discussions that are pertinent to the topic of the session. This includes interrupting, if required, any derogatory or irrelevant interventions, and actively encouraging interventions from different stakeholder groups.
- **Dynamic exchanges:** Moderators should remind participants in the audience to avoid reading from prepared written statements, documents or published texts. Written statements may be sent to the Forum secretariat for posting on the Forum webpage. Participants in the audience should also be encouraged to make short, relevant interventions or to ask questions relevant to the topic of the session.
- **Timekeeping:** Given that time for every item on the Forum programme is limited, moderators are asked to assist in managing the scheduled time for the session and the allotted speaking time. The goal of the Forum is to enable multi-stakeholder participation in the discussions, which can be facilitated if panellists and participants taking the floor stay within their allotted time. To that end, moderators might be required to remind speakers that they should respect the speaking time allotted to them (generally maximum 1-2 minutes).