

Remarks of Ms. Lise Kingo, Executive Director of UN Global Compact

United Nations Forum on Business and Human Rights, Geneva

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Thank you very much Diana and the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights for inviting me today.

The UN Global Compact works hard to promote the Guiding Principles as part of our mandate from the UN General Assembly to promote responsible business practices and UN values among the global business community and the UN System. Thus, I am delighted to be here.

Some of you may know that I joined as the Executive Director of the UN Global Compact on September 1st. While I may be new to this role, I have worked on sustainability issues for more than 25 years in the private sector. I can thus attest to the immense contribution that the UN Guiding Principles and the Global Compact's human rights principles have made in driving progress on corporate human rights implementation.

The SDGs & Business: Act Responsibly, *Then* Find Opportunity

This year is historic. In September all 193 Member States of the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals as part of Agenda 2030 to build a more just, more equitable and more sustainable future for all.

These global goals result from a most inclusive process and acknowledge the critical role business can play in driving economic development and applying innovation to help solve global challenges.

The number of business events that accompanied the launch of the goals attest to private sector willingness to contribute solutions.

While this momentum is welcome, it is our job to also help business understand how to engage in the sustainable development agenda in the right way.

Respect for universal principles must be the bedrock of corporate sustainability efforts. If all companies took fundamental steps to respect human rights we would make enormous progress towards achieving the global goals.

Unfortunately, we continue to see instances of corporate abuse playing out around the world – from land grabs, child labour to tax avoidance.

To ensure business contributes to rather than undermines sustainable development, we must see the corporate responsibility to respect human rights as a critical component of business' role on the SDGs.

In addition to a moral imperative, market incentives are shifting so that there need not be a trade-off between being competitive and being responsible. Operating responsibly increasingly provides a competitive edge.

Statement in Support of UN Guiding Principles and Sustainable Development Goals

However, more work is needed to change mindsets and we can have greater success in doing so when we join forces.

This is why the UN Global Compact led an effort with 10 global business organizations to release a statement affirming that implementation of the UN Guiding Principles is a key vehicle for business to contribute to inclusive and peaceful societies everywhere, as envisioned by the SDGs.

In addition to the baseline responsibility to respect human rights, there are many opportunities for companies to positively support and contribute to broader sustainable development.

These opportunities range from promoting gender equality in the workplace; supporting the rule of law; or adopting inclusive business models that meet the needs of low-income populations.

Whether we are talking about scaling up action on the Guiding Principles or contributing to the SDGs, we need at least three ingredients:

First, we need leadership. Businesses must have top-level commitment and accountability to assess their impacts, engage in genuine dialogue with rights-holders, and to innovate their business models.

Second, stakeholder collaboration is critical. We must co-invest in solutions to shared challenges. This means collective efforts that pool resources, share risks and aim to scale solutions.

Third, greater communication and transparency is crucial to building trust and strengthening relationships with stakeholders.

To help, the UN Global Compact is dedicated to providing tools, guidance, and dialogue platforms for companies and stakeholders. One example is the recently released Poverty Footprint Guide developed with Oxfam which helps companies and civil society partners assess value-chain impacts on poverty.

The Human Rights and Business Dilemmas Forum is another example with dozens of human rights and business themes, training materials, and discussion forums.

We hope these tools will help to scale up successful implementation of the Guiding Principles and business contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals, which will serve as a lighthouse to guide business action for the next 15 years.

The UN Global Compact looks forward to continuing to collaborate with business and many partners here today.

It is a big challenge, but delivering a better future for all is not a nice to have – it is a necessity.

Thank you.