



18 November
11:40-13:00
Room XX (Building E)

Open for Business: The new role of the private sector in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals - Building an approach based on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights

Organized by the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights in collaboration with the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, the Danish Institute for Human Rights, Global Reporting Initiative, Oxfam and the Institute for Human Rights and Business

Focus of the session

The session will explore the linkages between the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the sustainable development goals (SDGs), and how States and companies can operationalize the Guiding Principles as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In doing so it will serve as a consultation with experts and stakeholders to inform a forthcoming position paper by the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights on how the Guiding Principles should be incorporated in the 2030 Agenda follow-up efforts.

Panel

Moderator: **Allan Lerberg Jørgensen**, *Danish Institute for Human Rights*

Scene-setting: **Sammie Eddico**, *Permanent Representative of Ghana to the UN in Geneva*

Introductory presentations:

- **Margaret Wachenfeld**, *Institute for Human Rights and Business*
- **Celine Steer**, *Global Reporting Initiative*
- **Mauricio Lazala**, *Business and Human Rights Resource Centre*

Stakeholder perspectives:

- **Christine Chow**, *Hermes Equity Ownership Services*
- **Kate Donald**, *Center for Economic and Social Rights*

Closing comments: **Puvan Selvanathan**, *UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights*

Background

In September 2015 UN Member States adopted a new global agenda for sustainable development. This encompasses 17 SDGs intended to promote dignity, equality and prosperity for all people everywhere. Human rights cut across the 17 goals, and the private sector is positioned to deliver or support the delivery of many of them. The new goals are hugely ambitious, and if we are serious about reaching them, also extremely expensive. While States have reached agreement on the content of the SDGs, it is not clear how the estimated need of USD 5 trillion to USD 7 trillion in annual investments will be raised. Much of the discussion on this issue has focused on mobilizing the private sector as a key provider of capital, jobs, technology and infrastructure. There has been less discussion, however, on the actual role of the private sector - specifically what reforms are required to ensure the business contributes to, rather than undermines, the SDGs. The 2030 sustainable development agenda is open for business, but how do we ensure clear expectations about what kind of business is needed?

As emphasized in the UN Working Group's report to the 29th Human Rights Council (A/HRC/29/28), the Guiding Principles provide at least one important part of the answer, as a universally agreed global standard for States and companies to ensure that business and investment do not come at the cost of human rights and development. Crucially, the outcome documents of the UN summit and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda explicitly cite the Guiding Principles and the need to protect rights in the context of private sector contributions to solving sustainable development challenges. However, as underlined by the Working Group, much work remains to be done to solidify and translate the SDGs into action by States and businesses and to ensure that businesses will contribute to, not undermine, inclusive and sustainable development in the period beyond 2015.

The Guiding Principles should serve as a framework to guide efforts at the national level in this respect. Conversely, the 2030 agenda for sustainable development represents the biggest opportunity for global awareness and action on business and human rights since the endorsement of the Guiding Principles themselves.

Aims and objectives

The core aim of the session is to unpack these opportunities, by highlighting the critical importance of ensuring action on the three pillars of the Guiding Principles – Protect, Respect Remedy – for achieving progress on the SDGs. The session will feature recommendations from experts and other stakeholders on ways to strengthen State and corporate accountability in the context of private sector contributions to solving sustainable development challenges. The discussion will inform the development of a position paper by the Working Group (in collaboration with partners) on measuring business and human rights and incorporating the Guiding Principles in the context of the SDGs implementation.

Key discussion questions

- What are the key touch points between the Guiding Principles in terms of particular sustainable development goals and targets?
- How can human rights due diligence and access to remedy enhance the business contribution to the sustainable development goals?
- How can the State duty to protect human rights from business-related impacts inform national policy, laws and other actions to implement the SDGs?

- What role can the Guiding Principles play in ensuring better impact of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development?
- How can better measurement and tracking of State and business performance on the Guiding Principles help advance progress on the SDG?

Format

The session will take place as an interactive moderated discussion among the panellists, with half of the 90-minutes session time reserved for questions from and discussion with the floor.

Background reading

- *Report by the Working Group to the 29th UN Human Rights Council (A/HRC/29/28)*, available at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Business/Pages/Reports.aspx>
- *Press statement by the Working Group, "Corporations must contribute to sustainable development by respecting human rights"*, available at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16231&LangID=E>
- *State of Play 4: Business and the Sustainable Development Goals: Mind the Gap – Challenges for Implementation*, Institute for Human Rights and Business, available at <http://www.ihrb.org/pdf/state-of-play/Business-and-the-SDGs.pdf>
- *The Human Rights Guide to the SDGs*, Danish Institute for Human Rights, available at <http://www.humanrights.dk/human-rights-guide-sdgs>
- *The SDG Compass*, Global Reporting Initiative, UN Global Compact and World Business Council for Sustainable Development, available at <http://sdgcompass.org/>

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