



PERMANENT MISSION OF NORWAY

STATEMENT

UN Forum for Business and Human Rights 16 – 18 November. Concluding High Level Panel. Statement by State Secretary Tone Skogen.

First of all, thank you for inviting me, as a representative of the Government of Norway, to participate in this closing panel. Today I have had a chance to gain an impression of all the activities here, which are impressive.

In the development of our National Action Plan that was launched on 12 October, we received valuable input from a wide range of stakeholders – civil society, companies, trade unions and other interested parties. Stakeholder dialogue is essential for bringing this agenda forward, and stakeholder dialogue is important to our Government.

I am here today to talk about the state's obligation to protect human rights. The measures that are most effective will of course differ between countries.

Firstly, one of the tasks that governments are uniquely placed to carry out is to develop laws and regulations that can protect human rights within specific sectors or in relation to specific actors.

Generally speaking, Norwegian legislation safeguards human rights in Norway and in some instances also in the operations of Norwegian companies abroad. One of the latest examples of this was the amendment made to the Accounting Act, under which large enterprises have been required to submit reports on CSR since 2013.

Although Norway already has sound legislation in place that applies to business, it may be necessary to consider amending certain acts in the light of the Guiding Principles and other international developments.

Our action plan therefore proposes that there should be reviews at regular intervals to ensure that legislation keeps pace with international developments. Coherent follow-up should be ensured, both in legislation and policy. As stated in Norway's Action Plan, the Government will appoint an interministerial working group to ensure coherence across ministries and government agencies.

Second, the Norwegian Action Plan sets out the Norwegian authorities' clear expectation that Norwegian companies respect human rights. Many Norwegian enterprises operate in emerging markets, sometimes with poorly developed legislation or a poor capacity to enforce human rights legislation.

These companies are requesting clear expectations and sometimes advice from – or cooperation with – the Government on closely related subjects such as security, risks and anti-corruption. States should strengthen their capacity to give advice and engage in dialogue on issues of this kind, both at home and through their diplomatic and consular missions and other public agencies.

I would like to underline that there is also a need to strengthen the protection of human rights defenders working to promote economic, social and cultural rights. This is the responsibility of States, but we should not forget the responsibility of business enterprises to avoid interfering with such activities and to have meaningful consultations with human rights defenders and other stakeholders.

States should also seek to harmonise their expectations in international forums that support and provide guidance to enterprises. This is necessary across institutions such as the UN, the OECD, the multilateral financial institutions and the regional development banks. The aim is to strengthen human rights by securing predictable and similar incentive structures for business across regions.

The OHCHR Accountability and Remedy Project is an important concrete example of international efforts to move the agenda forward. The project aims to provide concrete guidance to states on how to better implement their existing legal duties to provide effective remedy for victims of corporate-related human rights abuses and to enhance accountability for those who have committed harm.

To sum up my three important issues related to the role of the State:

- 1) Governments must step up national efforts and send clear and coherent signals to business through effective regulation, policies and incentives.
- 2) They should set out clear expectations to the business community as to how they should respect human rights and help them fulfil these expectations.
- 3) States should also speed up international efforts to fill gaps in global governance and frameworks. In this way we can secure coherent and predictable expectations for companies across regions.

Thank you.