Sixth Annual UN Forum on Business and Human Rights

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UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

Statement by

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Director

Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to

Development Division

Excellencies,

Chair of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights,

Distinguished delegates and participants,

Colleagues and friends,

On behalf of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all of you, particularly those who have travelled to Geneva from far afield to take part in this sixth UN Forum on Business and Human Rights. The High Commissioner is unable to be present at today's opening of the Forum, but he looks forward to joining you at the closing plenary on Wednesday. I also would like to thank all those who make the holding of the Forum possible, in particular the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights.

The Forum is a unique platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue in that Government representatives, business leaders, civil society organizations, trade unions and other stakeholders come together to for frank exchanges of views on human rights in the context of business activities. It allows to assess progress, gaps and lessons learned from different points of view.

We are very proud that the number of participants from all geographic regions and all stakeholder groups keeps growing as this growth underlines the relevance of this space to be able to discuss these vital issues. It also reflects the truly global and multi-stakeholder nature of the Business and Human Rights agenda.

The central theme of this year's Forum, "Realizing Access to Effective Remedy", will put a welcome spotlight on the third pillar of the UN Guiding

Principles on Business and Human Rights. It is widely recognised that that pillar has been lagging behind in terms of up-take, so the discussions that will take place over the coming days are both timely and overdue. We are pleased to contribute the findings and outcomes of the OHCHR Accountability and Remedy Project to these deliberations.

Colleagues and friends,

At OHCHR we are currently discussing the way forward in the next four years. One of the key issues that have come up in that context – against the backdrop of conflicts and natural disasters and large-scale migration, against the backdrop of renewed nationalist and populist movements, against the backdrop of a world that is so rapidly changing – is the need to build better understanding in the general public about human rights and why they matter.

As the High Commissioner put it recently: "what would change the trajectory, would be the existence of a much broader, indeed world-wide, wave of popular support for universal human rights. […] We must now intensify, greatly, our advocacy and expand our reach in a manner that is without precedent." We are very fortunate to have a group of people gathered in this room who can help us to make that movement happen – and we count on you for getting the "persuadables" on board and for putting the argument across to the skeptics.

Colleagues and friends,

The Forum wants to be a space where views can be exchanged openly and where we can learn from each other. We will not always agree on the best way forward. But all of us have come together with a shared objective: making human rights real and providing protection to people

Let us bear that objective in mind. In a few weeks we will begin a year-long celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: this promise anchored in human dignity and equality. On behalf of people across the globe whose rights are affected by businesses, on behalf of those who do not have access to remedy, on behalf of those who might benefit if businesses would press for rights, let us commit to join in this Forum to making a real difference, to pushing back against injustice and inequality, to building a better future for our children. Let us use this moment to Stand Up for Human Rights.

Thank you.