



Inaugural UN South Asia Forum on Business and Human Rights

14-15 March 2019

The Claridges Hotel, New Delhi, India

BACKGROUND:

Building on the annual UN Forum on Business and Human Rights, the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights (UNWG) in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is organizing the inaugural UN South Asia Forum on Business and Human Rights on 14-15 March 2019. The UN South Asia Forum is aimed at raising awareness about business and human rights issues in South Asia and facilitating implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), including through national action plans. The two-day event will bring together various stakeholders from South Asia, and beyond.

Business and Human Rights in South Asia

Asia is the largest continent and is home to about 60% of the world population. Nearly all the countries in the South Asian region – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka – are making progress in accelerating economic development and achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, despite this progress, these countries continue to face common challenges concerning business-related human rights abuses. The rise of globalized market economy opened doors to create jobs and access to formal economy in the region – thus helping poor join the workforce, providing stable employment and some measures of social security, and raising the standard of living and improving social mobility. At the same time, it exposed individuals and communities to negative impacts of business operations, including through their supply chains. Unsafe working conditions, low wages, child labour, forced labour, environmental pollution, forced land acquisition, persecution of human rights defenders are some of the key human rights impacts of businesses in the region. Moreover, the benefits of economic development have not been shared equitably and many groups including women, children, persons with disabilities, and indigenous peoples continue to face adverse impacts of business activities disproportionately.

It is important therefore to take a closer look at how businesses can collaborate with government, civil society, academia and other social actors to prevent, mitigate and remedy adverse impacts of their activities on human rights and contribute to achieving SDGs in South Asia. The UNGPs, which were unanimously endorsed by the Human Rights Council in June 2011, provide a global authoritative framework to achieve these goals. It is in this context that the UNWG and UNDP are joining hands to organize the South Asia Forum highlighting key business and human rights issues in the region, and identifying opportunities for effective implementation of the UNGPs in the region.

OBJECTIVES:

- To assess the key challenges, opportunities and progress made in South Asia in implementing the UNGPs;
- To initiate a multi-stakeholder dialogue to promote implementation of the UNGPs, including through the development of National Action Plans;
- To encourage peer-learning amongst States and businesses in South Asia, facilitating regional exchange of good practices;
- To build synergies in implementing the UNGPs and accomplishing SDGs;
- To explore ways to strengthen judicial and non-judicial mechanisms to provide effective remedies to affected individuals and communities; and
- To discuss the role of National Human Rights Institutions to address business-related human rights abuses at both national and regional levels.

AGENDA:

The agenda of the UN South Asia Forum will be developed in consultation with the relevant stakeholders. We, however, envisage that issues such as the following will be discussed during the two-day Forum:

- A general introduction to the UNGPs for those attending the Forum that have not yet been exposed to the Protect, Respect and Remedy framework
- Challenges and opportunities in UNGPs' implementation in South Asia
- National action plans to implement the UNGPs: potential pathways in South Asia
- Comparative experiences from other regions of Asia where the business and human rights discourse is already progressing
- Connecting UNGPs with SDGs
- Strengthening compliance with labour rights and standards
- Health and safety at workplace: building on what works
- Supply chains and export processing zones
- Human rights due diligence, including environmental impact assessment
- Sector specific human rights impacts (e.g., extractives, manufacturing, agriculture, textile, ship-breaking etc.)
- Gendered impacts of businesses and their operations
- Role of CSOs, human rights defenders and trade unions in promoting business respect for human rights
- Judicial and non-judicial mechanisms available in the region to access to remedy in context of business-related human rights impacts
- Role of NHRIs in addressing business-related human rights impacts

Practical information:

The South Asia Forum is convened by the Working Group and UNDP. The Forum will take place on 14-15 March 2018 at the Claridges Hotel, 12 Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Road, New Delhi – 110011, India. Further information about the South Asia Forum can be accessed here: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Business/Pages/SouthAsiaRegionalForum.aspx>

As the organizers have limited funds, we would encourage participants to explore funding from your respective organizations/institutions. Those requiring support are encouraged to notify the Forum secretariat as early as possible.

If requested, formal letters of invitation will be made available for visa applications purposes.

Should more information be required about the South Asia Forum, please contact the Forum Secretariat: Dr. Harpreet Kaur, Business and Human Rights Specialist, UNDP (harpreet.kaur@undp.org), and Victoria de Mello, Project Coordinator, Business and Human Rights, UNDP (victoria.demello@undp.org).