

Promoting inclusion and countering anti-migrant narratives: Leveraging the role of business

27 November, 13.30-14.45

Palais des Nations, Room XX

Moderator's opening remarks

- Welcome to the session on *Promoting inclusion and countering anti-migrant narratives*, with the specific focus on leveraging the role of business.
- Migrants are the subject of frenetic debate in political circles, in the media and public discourse. This discussion is deeply polarised and very often openly xenophobic, with refugees and other migrants, as well as minorities associated with migration being demonised, vilified, and used as scapegoats for deep-seated – and often unrelated – fears about terrorism and security, crime, unemployment, the viability of welfare systems and other aspects of globalization. Facts have been disregarded, demeaning language, stereotypes and myths propagated and false information spread often unchallenged.
- While for some, instigating anti-migrant discourse delivers easy political gains, others do it as a means of boosting sales and advertising revenue. But for the migrants themselves, such narratives can have far-reaching impacts on their lives. When migrants are criminalized and even dehumanized by policies and rhetoric, the message that is given is that they have no rights, no place in society. As a result, migrants may fear harassment by simply being in public spaces, they may avoid seeking help when they've been

attacked, and many migrants may be forced to endure discriminatory practices without being able to seek justice.

- The evidence, on the other hand, tells us that the stereotypes are wrong; migrants overwhelmingly are *not* criminals or health risks, they are *not* scroungers or lazy, they tend to contribute more than they take out of societies. And above all, regardless of their status, how they left their homes and why they decided to move, all migrants are equally entitled and deserving of respect for their human rights. Even inadvertently, we must avoid giving a message that some migrants are more deserving of their rights and dignity than others.
- The UN Human Rights office has over the last two years sought to find ways to change the narrative on migrants and migration from one based on prejudice, fear, and misperceptions, to a positive narrative based on evidence, on our shared values of human rights, diversity, solidarity, humanity and empathy. We are driven by the idea that a human rights-based approach seeks to empower migrants and the communities into which they arrive. Accordingly, on 18 December – International Migrants’ Day – this year we will launch a short series of videos that allow migrants to tell us their experiences in their own words, and that emphasize the commonalities of human experience that bind us all together. Human rights principles tell us that we have more in common than the differences that divide us. We welcome you all to join us to share these stories and conversations, and to tell us about your own experiences of migration.
- Today, during this session at the Business and Human Rights Forum, we want to discuss the particular role of business in addressing such issues of

xenophobia, exclusion and anti-migrant sentiment. Private sector companies have at times been vocal in challenging racism and discrimination, as well as in promoting diversity and inclusion: advertisers have redirected their marketing expenditure away from publications accused of fuelling hatred towards those that report accurately and fairly; companies have issued statements against particularly egregious migration policies; and businesses have led or joined initiatives aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion.

- The important public voice of business and its position at the decision-making table vest the private sector with a specific role – and indeed I would argue even a responsibility - to stand up for the human rights of migrants and inclusive societies. Leveraging this role can ultimately have a powerful impact on ensuring that our societies reject narratives of exclusion and discrimination.
- The aim of the discussion with our speakers today, is therefore to:
 - Identify what role business can play and learn from experiences in the business community on how to challenge anti-migrant narratives and to promote positive, inclusive messages;
 - Recognise ways in which the tools provided by the international human rights framework can be useful;
 - Explore how multi-stakeholder partnerships and initiatives can galvanise and engage communities to stand up for migrants' human rights.

Introduction of panellists

- **Richard Wilson**, Co-founder of Stop Funding Hate. Stop Funding Hate has challenged companies to stop advertising in anti-migrant and divisive newspapers, and has recently been awarded the Jo Cox award by the #NO2H8 Crime Awards.
- **Chris Gale**, Social Mission Strategy Manager, Ben and Jerry's. Ben and Jerry's promotes ideas and actions that drive inclusion and harmony in communities.
- **Lorenz Isler**, Sustainability Manager, IKEA. IKEA has championed integration of refugees and other migrants in Switzerland and elsewhere.
- **Irit Tamir**, Advocacy Manager, Oxfam. Oxfam has recently conducted research on the business policy agenda in the US related to migration and refugee issues.

Moderator's closing remarks

- As we have heard today, important examples exist of how business is weighing in and taking a public stand to reject hatred and xenophobia against migrants. Whether alone or in association with other peers and organizations, companies have committed not to fuel further hatred through ethical advertising. Businesses have come forward to promote diversity in the work place and seek ways to encourage inclusion of newcomers. They have taken a stand against policy measures that exclude and discriminate against foreigners. But much more can still be done and improved cooperation in this regard can bring us a long way.
- Some of the key ingredients to more positive and inclusive narratives on migration include the following: a measured, fair and open discussion is essential. We must pay attention to the language we use to describe refugees and other migrants and migratory phenomena. We must generate evidence about the positive and negative impacts of migration; and we must not allow migrants to serve as scapegoats for various agendas. Left unchallenged, harmful stereotyping and anti-migrant narratives and policies will tear at the fabric that make up our societies in disregard of the shared values upon which they are based.
- Strong voices are needed, followed-up by actions that reflect the commitment and importance of the issues at stake. The business community can play a vital role in taking positive action to fight the epidemic of hatred and xenophobia we are witnessing today:

- Through initiating or joining and funding local campaigns and standing up publicly for the rights and dignity of all migrants;
- By adopting a strong inward and outward-facing company policy against discrimination, xenophobia and racism and in support of diversity and inclusion, and rigorously adhering to national anti-discrimination laws;
- Through implementing branding, advertising and lobbying strategies that promote diversity and inclusion;
- By increasing and promoting diversity in the workplace and adopting a robust zero-tolerance policy against racism, xenophobia and discrimination
- And finally, by encouraging each other to take responsibility and stand up for migrants' human rights.