WORKING TOGETHER: NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS AND GLOBAL COMPACT LOCAL NETWORKS

A Shared Vision: Respecting Human Rights

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and Global Compact Local Networks (GCLNs) both have important roles to play in strengthening business respect for and support of human rights. NHRIs and GCLNs share the aim of helping business understand and meet their human rights responsibilities and commitments. This common goal provides a strong foundation for NHRIs and GCLNs to explore opportunities for collaboration and mutual support.

The first six principles of the UN Global Compact are derived from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Principles 1 and 2) and the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (Principles 3-6):

**Principle 1**: Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights

**Principle 2**: Business should make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses

**Principle 3**: Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining

**Principle 4**: Businesses should uphold the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour

**Principle 5**: Businesses should uphold the effective abolition of child labour

**Principle 6**: Businesses should uphold the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation

The Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact are available here: [http://www.unglobalcompact.org/AboutTheGC/TheTenPrinciples/index.html](http://www.unglobalcompact.org/AboutTheGC/TheTenPrinciples/index.html)

About this Fact Sheet

- The objectives of this fact sheet are to:
  - Explain NHRIs to United Nations Global Compact (UN Global Compact) participants and GCLNs;
  - Explain GCLNs to NHRIs; and
  - Help GCLNs and NHRIs identify synergies and opportunities at the national level in promoting business respect for and support of human rights and labour in line with UN Global Compact Principles 1-6.

The Danish Institute for Human Rights has prepared this fact sheet on behalf of the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions, and in collaboration with the UN Global Compact, and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

UN Global Compact Human Rights and Labour Working Group

In 2006, the UN Global Compact established a Human Rights Working Group to help advance the business and human rights agenda within the framework of the UN Global Compact. With the endorsement of the Guiding Principles by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2011 and the growing recognition that labour rights are human rights, the Human Rights Working Group merged with the Labour Working Group in 2013.

The Human Rights and Labour Working Group (HRLWG) is a multi-stakeholder group comprising UN Global Compact companies, individuals from UN agencies and academia, civil society organisations active on business and human rights, and GCLN representatives with a particular interest in business and human rights. The HRLWG provides advice and makes recommendations to advance the business and human rights agenda within the framework of the UN Global Compact and the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. This includes helping to identify emerging human rights and labour issues, as well as identifying and promoting useful human rights tools, resources, and good practices for business.

Another key objective of the HRLWG is to support and build the capacity of GCLNs to advance the UN Global Compact’s human rights and labour principles.
**Introducing Global Compact Local Networks**

**UN Global Compact and Human Rights**

The UN Global Compact takes a two-pronged practical approach to business and human rights by raising awareness of:

1. What human rights are and how they are relevant for business; and
2. What business can do within their own operations and more broadly in their spheres of influence to respect and support human rights, including how to avoid being complicit in human rights abuses.

The UN Global Compact fully embraces the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which provide further conceptual clarity to and operationalize the two human rights principles championed by the UN Global Compact: the respect and support of internationally proclaimed human rights and ensuring businesses are not complicit in human rights abuses (Principles 1 and 2). The UN Global Compact continues to actively promote the Guiding Principles globally as well as locally via GCLNs.

The UN Global Compact and GCLNs also aim to increase business’ understanding of how to respect and support the rights of specific stakeholder groups through various initiatives and activities (e.g. the Women’s Empowerment Principles, the Children’s Rights and Business Principles, the Business Reference Guide to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities). In addition, the UN Global Compact is engaging the business community in mobilizing support for the Rule of Law through an initiative launched by the UN Secretary-General.

**What are Local Networks?**

GCLNs are organized by UN Global Compact participants in a given country that gather voluntarily to advance the UN Global Compact’s Ten Principles. GCLNs help root the UN Global Compact’s principles in different national, cultural and geographical contexts.

**What do GCLNs do?**

GCLNs support companies in implementing their commitment to the UN Global Compact’s principles in their strategies, operations and spheres of influence, and also serve as a safe space for learning, dialogue and engagement on various issues, including business and human rights.

**Why should companies get involved in a GCLN?**

Joining a Local Network gives companies the opportunity to engage with various stakeholders such as representatives from civil society, government, academia, professional associations and other businesses, and exchange ideas and experiences on implementing the UN Global Compact’s principles.

All UN Global Compact participants are encouraged to get involved in their Local Networks. Additionally, when relevant, parent companies can facilitate engagement by subsidiaries. As described in the Case Studies section of this fact sheet, GCLNs can play an integral role in raising awareness and mobilizing business respect and support for human rights in a national context.

Local Networks are a good conduit to help UN Global Compact participants think globally and act locally.

---

**The initiatives and contributions of Local Networks are making significant inroads towards the implementation of the ten principles of the Global Compact, and provide an important base to jump-start action and awareness on the ground.**

– Georg Kell
Executive Director, UN Global Compact

For more information on GCLNs, please see: http://www.unglobalcompact.org/NetworksAroundTheWorld/
Introduction to National Human Rights Institutions

What are NHRIs?

NHRIs are independent, expert bodies on human rights established through national laws or constitutions. NHRIs have a legal mandate to engage in activities to promote and protect human rights. These activities can include outreach and human rights education. NHRIs are not NGOs (non-government organizations). They are public bodies, part of the state but completely independent of the national government. Their roles are distinct yet complementary to those of NGOs and governments. To guarantee their independence, pluralism, and effectiveness, NHRIs are subject to periodic peer review and accreditation.

NHRIs and the United Nations

The United Nations strongly supports NHRIs. The UN General Assembly's 1993 Principles Relating to the Status and Functioning of National Institutions (Paris Principles) set minimum international standards on independence and core functions of NHRIs. OHCHR provides institutional support for NHRIs. OHCHR helps to establish and/or strengthen NHRIs, and to build their capacity to work effectively and independently in compliance with the Paris Principles. The UN Development Programme (UNDP) also works closely with individual NHRIs across the globe.

NHRIs: Building corporate respect for human rights

In 2011, the UN Human Rights Council welcomed the NHRIs’ roles in relation to human rights and business, and encouraged them to build their capacity on business and human rights. The Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights also highlight the role of NHRIs across the UN “Protect, Respect, Remedy” framework on business and human rights:

**Pillar 1:** NHRIs can help to align national law and regulations on business with human rights such as through National Action Plans;

**Pillar 2:** NHRIs can provide expert, independent advice to business on human rights issues; and

**Pillar 3:** NHRIs can facilitate mediation or conciliation of complaints about human rights and business issues.

For more information on NHRIs, please see the ICC website: [http://nhri.ohchr.org/EN/Pages/default.aspx](http://nhri.ohchr.org/EN/Pages/default.aspx)

NHRIs: Stepping up engagement with business

In October 2010, NHRIs adopted the Edinburgh Declaration on Business and Human Rights. This clearly signals NHRIs’ joint commitment to supporting better understanding and respect for human rights in business operations. In particular, the Declaration encourages NHRIs to consider partnerships between NHRIs and GCLNs, and outreach to government, businesses and civil society.


In addition, regional networks of NHRIs have recently committed to taking action to support implementing of human rights in the business sphere and examples include:

- Asia Pacific Forum of NHRIs: [http://www.asiapacificforum.net/](http://www.asiapacificforum.net/)

Working Together: Opportunities Map

**Legislative Frameworks**
GCLNs and NHRIs can promote more effective implementation of governments’ human rights obligations at the national level, e.g. through information exchange and awareness raising on relevant legislation and policy measures.

**Direct Engagement with Business**
GCLNs can work with NHRIs to coordinate outreach to national businesses and business associations to promote engagement on human rights issues, e.g. through multi-stakeholder platforms. Such engagement can also help identify business-related human rights impacts and opportunities, and provide more clarity among business on the human rights standards that they are expected to uphold.

**Convening National Dialogues**
NHRIs and GCLNs can act as conveners for discussions among business, government bodies, and other stakeholders on important human rights and business issues at the national level, building understanding, and identifying common challenges and solutions.

**Human Rights Tools for Business**
GCLNs and NHRIs can promote learning at the national level among businesses and other key stakeholders regarding tools and methods that businesses can use to implement their responsibility to respect and commitment to support human rights and to undertake human rights due diligence.

**Partnering with International Organizations**
NHRIs and GCLNs can jointly facilitate stronger dialogue on human rights and business with United Nations agencies at the national level (e.g. OHCHR, ILO, UNEP, UNDP and UNIDO) as well as with relevant regional institutions. This in turn may help identify partnership opportunities.

**Cooperating with Civil Society**
GCLNs’ engagement with NHRIs and civil society organizations, especially those working on corporate responsibility, including human rights, may help to build a better environment for business respect and support for human rights.

**Information, Education, and Awareness Raising**
NHRIs and GCLNs can collaborate to develop platforms to provide information, education, research, and public awareness on business and human rights issues for companies and other stakeholders. They can also co-host public events to stimulate awareness and engagement by business and communities on sustainability issues.
Many NHRIs and GCLNs are active on business and human rights. A few examples of collaboration between NHRIs and GCLNs on advancing human rights are included below.

**Denmark**
The Global Compact Self-Assessment Tool was co-developed by the Confederation of Danish Industry, the Industrialization Fund for Developing Countries, the Danish Business Authority, and the Danish Institute for Human Rights in collaboration with the UN Global Compact. The free, online tool is designed for use by all companies who are committed to upholding social and environmental standards in their operations, and enables companies to measure their performance on the UN Global Compact Ten Principles.

In 2013, the tool was revised to include a new management section in addition to updated human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption sections. The new management feature of the tool enables self-assessment of processes ensuring that the UN Global Compact Principles are adequately assessed, defined, implemented and communicated in line with the UN Global Compact Blueprint and the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Access the tool here: [http://www.globalcompactselfassessment.org/](http://www.globalcompactselfassessment.org/)

**Republic of Korea**
The Global Compact Network Korea, in collaboration with the National Human Rights Commission of Korea and the Business Institute for Sustainable Development, jointly hosted a forum on business and human rights during 2012-2013. At this forum, major issues were addressed among various stakeholders including business, academia, and civil society. Topics discussed included current trends and responses regarding business and human rights in overseas business operations as well as preventative measures for workers handling dangerous articles or substances.

For further information, please see:
- NHRC Korea website: [http://www.humanrights.go.kr/index.jsp](http://www.humanrights.go.kr/index.jsp)

**Germany**
The Global Compact Network Germany in collaboration with the German Institute for Human Rights hosted a workshop on Human Rights Due Diligence as a method to address the skill shortage within the German metal and electrical industries. Experts from business enterprises as well as research institutes that specialize on the retention of skilled workers participated in the workshop. The workshop illustrated how human rights due diligence can help identify potential skilled workers that were not recognized before, enabling businesses to profit by hiring more skilled workers and reducing racial discrimination in the labour market.

For further information, please see the GCNW website: [http://www.globalcompact.de/sites/default/files/jahr/publikation/protokoll_dgcn_arbeitstreffen_20131015.pdf](http://www.globalcompact.de/sites/default/files/jahr/publikation/protokoll_dgcn_arbeitstreffen_20131015.pdf)
Australia

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) gave support to the formation of the Global Compact Network Australia (GCNA) in 2009. The AHRC and GCNA have continued to work to achieve common goals and advance business understanding of and respect for human rights.

AHRC and GCNA collaborate closely to develop resources to help business apply human rights standards to their daily activities. One example is the development of a series of Business and Human Rights Fact Sheets. The two organizations also collaborate in the GCNA’s Human Rights Leadership Group for Business and the GCNA’s Indigenous Engagement Working Group, and plan to convene a national dialogue on business and human rights.

For further information, please see:
GCNA website: http://www.unglobalcompact.org.au

Germany

Global Compact Network Germany in collaboration with the German Institute for Human Rights published an introductory guide for business, available in German and English, where the three pillars of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights are presented and relevant rights are highlighted and explained. The publication also offers a collection of case studies, highlighting successful approaches to human rights challenges, and includes a list of guidance material for further information on business and human rights. The Guide directly influenced the action of different stakeholders in this field; for example, it laid the groundwork for a Management Guide that was developed by German and Swiss tourism companies.

For further information, please see the GCNG website: http://www.globalcompact.de/publikationen/respecting-human-rights-introductory-guide-business

"It is important for the State to exercise foresight and take action to ensure compliance with international human rights laws and agreements, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups such as women, children, and indigenous people. A human rights-based approach leads to better and more sustainable outcomes. It clarifies the purpose of capacity building and puts the claims of the people (the "rights-holders") and the corresponding obligations of the State (the "duty-bearers") at the centre of the national development debate."

– Loretta Ann Rosales
Chair, ICC Working Group on Business and Human Rights
Chairperson, Philippines National Human Rights Commission