

BUSINESS WORKSHOP

WORKSHOP FOR UAE BUSINESS LEADERS:

Corporate Responsibility to Respect Human Rights in Practice

14 November 2012, Dubai, UAE



GLOBAL BUSINESS INITIATIVE
ON HUMAN RIGHTS



وزارة الخارجية
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS



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INTRODUCTION

This report has been written to document key speeches, discussions, insights and outcomes from a half-day business-to-business Workshop entitled 'Corporate Responsibility to Respect Human Rights in Practice', held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), on 14th November 2012. The Workshop was aimed at business leaders from the UAE as well as multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in the region. The event highlighted the experiences of UAE businesses and relevant experts, exploring the value of corporate respect for human rights, and challenges related to implementation in the Gulf and globally.

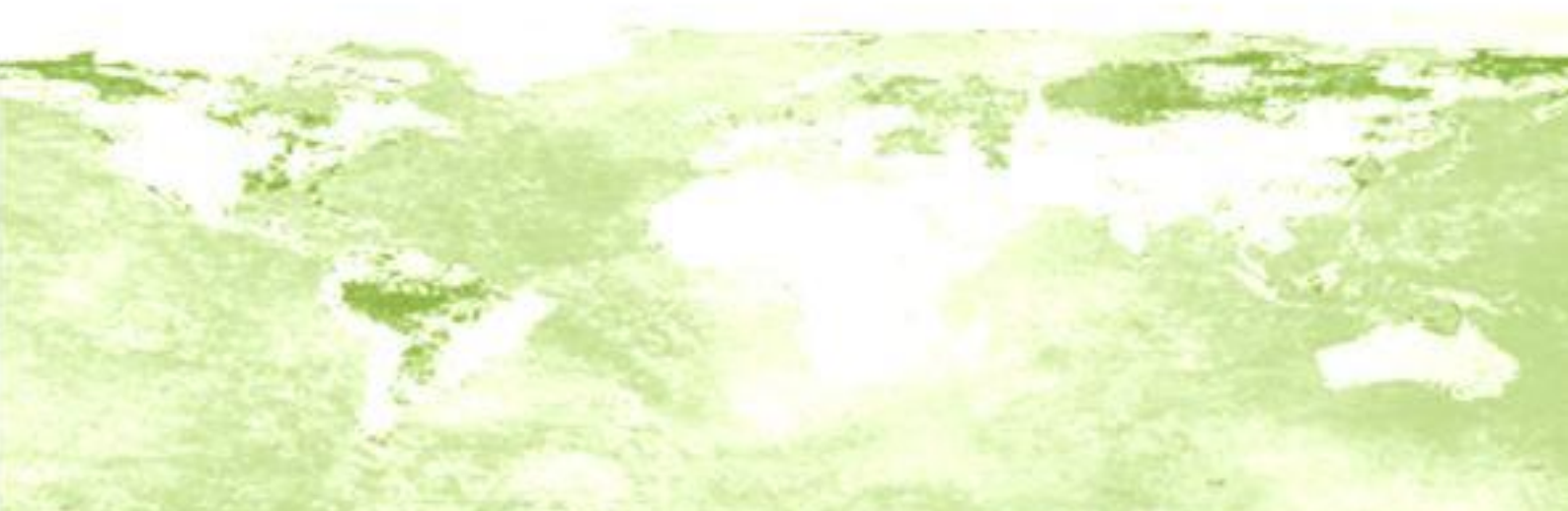
The objectives of the Workshop included:

- Demystifying the agenda by clarifying the link between human rights and business;
- Building the business case for using human rights as a way to understand and implement corporate responsibilities;
- Understanding practical road-maps to integrate respect for human rights into current policies, practices and initiatives; and
- Exchanging experiences on good practices and challenges for corporations in the UAE in respecting human rights in their operations.

The event was attended by over 30 participants from business. This meeting was the first event of its kind in the Gulf region.

Speakers at the event included representatives from leading UAE businesses such as Crescent Petroleum, DP World and TDIC; from multinational corporations such as ABB, General Electric Company, The Coca-Cola Company and Total; and from the United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights.

The event concluded with a dinner, with a keynote address from His Excellency Dr. Anwar Mohammed Gargash, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Federal National Council Affairs, United Arab Emirates, as well as feedback on the work of the UN Working Group and the discussions of the WEF Global Agenda Council (GAC) from Alexandra Guáqueta, Member of the United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights and of the GAC on Human Rights.



WORKSHOP IN BRIEF

WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

The Workshop opened with a session to set the context and current state of play of the business and human rights agenda—globally and locally—and outlined the objectives of the Workshop. The initial welcome and introduction was given by the conveners, represented by Dr Abdul Rahim Al Awadhi, Assistant Minister for Legal Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, United Arab Emirates; and Kathryn Dovey, Director, Global Business Initiative on Human Rights.

Key discussion points

- The UAE has recently been appointed to the UN Human Rights Council and has an interest in focusing on the theme of business and human rights.
- The UN Guiding Principles represent the authoritative global standard for understanding business and human rights. Human rights include but are broader than labour rights. In order to improve implementation of the corporate respect for human rights, UAE businesses must better integrate protection of human rights into their policies and practices.
- Corporate respect for human rights is best supported by distinct and active roles for government, business and civil society.

SESSION ONE: THE BUSINESS CASE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The first panel provided an opportunity to hear from major businesses from diverse sectors on the business case for respecting human rights in their operations. Panellists provided specific examples of why and how corporate respect for human rights makes sense for their company, and shared strategies and insights into how they have progressed the issue both internally and externally. Panellists were:

- Kathryn Wightman-Beaven, Head of Global Corporate Responsibility, DP World
- Ed Potter, Director, Global Workplace Rights, The Coca-Cola Company
- Peter Herbel, Senior Vice-President and General Counsel, Total
- Ron Popper, Head of Corporate Responsibility, ABB
- Liam McCollum, former General Counsel, General Electric Middle East & Africa.

Key discussion points

- Human rights historically have been seen as the responsibility of the government. However, companies now recognize that they have a responsibility to respect human rights as well, aligned to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
- The business case for companies to ensure respect for human rights may include some or all of the following: consistency with corporate core values; prevention of human rights challenges that can directly impact success of projects; legal concerns; reputational risk prevention, which can reduce costs in the long-term; the expectations of their customers, investors and other stakeholders, including the host country; pressure from other companies e.g. in their supply chain; and as a means of motivating and retaining employees.
- Corporate respect for human rights requires leadership from the top echelons of a business, which sometimes means initial awareness raising and technical knowledge are necessary.

- Internal policies are necessary, but further policies may be necessary to cover business relationships, for example supply chain or joint venture agreements.
- Sometimes there is a lack of clarity about the difference between corporate social responsibility and respect for human rights, but the UN Guiding Principles clarify the specific human rights responsibilities of business.

SESSION TWO: THE UN GUIDING PRINCIPLES – WHAT SHOULD BUSINESS DO?

The second session provided in-depth information on the UN Guiding Principles and their relevance for companies. Margaret Jungk, member of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, elaborated on the content and implications of these principles and their implementation in a business context.

Key discussion points

- The UN Guiding Principles are the authoritative global standard on business and human rights which address the role of both states and companies.
- Since the endorsement of the UN Guiding Principles in June 2011 by the UN Human Rights Council, many companies worldwide have begun to incorporate these tenets into their systems. Companies have found that the Guiding Principles provide clarification that has been essential to their understanding of their own responsibilities as well as the distinction between their role and the human rights duties of the state.
- Companies have both negative and positive obligations under the Guiding Principles. In particular, companies must question whether their operations may inadvertently contribute to adverse human rights impacts.
- In order to implement corporate respect for human rights, businesses must integrate human rights into their business and management systems.

SESSION THREE: COMPANY JOURNEYS AND CASE STUDIES

For the final session at the workshop, participants divided into smaller groups to hear how companies have developed their approach to human rights. Each group focused on a different theme: human rights due diligence, internal engagement and policy commitment, and understanding human rights challenges in the supply chain. The sessions included specific case studies from companies and the lessons they have learned with respect to business and human rights. Company introductions were provided by ABB, General Electric, TDIC, Total, Crescent Petroleum, the Coca-Cola Company and DP World.

Key discussion points

- Companies are at different points in their human rights journey. In general, companies have already taken some steps towards respecting human rights, but they see further steps that they can take.
- Establishing commitment to respecting human rights within a company can be done through an industry group or with an internal policy manual. Performance-related pay can be an incentive for middle management.
- Smaller companies may not have the leverage available to multinational corporations in terms of their ability to influence other businesses in their value chain, requiring different solutions.
- Specific challenges exist on the topic of migrant labour in the Gulf region, and the cooperation of both sending and receiving governments is required to improve practice.
- Another challenge companies have experienced is that of being undercut by competitors who are less concerned about their reputation and do not protect the rights of their workers.

CONVENERS



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The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) represents the foundations of UAE society and serves as its window to the outer world, communicating the thoughts and vision of the UAE leadership, asserting the values of human brotherhood, and calling for lifting the suffering of humans. The Ministry promotes the importance of attaining global peace and amicably resolving disputes through dialogue.



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THE GLOBAL BUSINESS INITIATIVE ON HUMAN RIGHTS (GBI) is a unique business-led initiative focused on advancing human rights in a business context around the world. GBI currently has 18 corporate members from 11 industry sectors with representation from Latin America, Asia, Europe, North America, and the Middle East. Through core group work streams and business outreach activities GBI seeks to build a global community of business leaders sharing good practices, identifying barriers to corporate respect for human rights in diverse contexts and inputting into international policy developments. Our work plan is divided into two parallel tracks. First, Action-Learning around the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights; and second, Business Awareness and Capacity Building through events and workshops in emerging and developing markets. GBI works in collaboration with the UN Global Compact Office and is supported by the Swiss Government.

For more information visit: www.global-business-initiative.org

