

News

IN THIS SECTION

Executive Update: Let's raise the bar on human rights

New York, United States of America

The following is an article by [Lise Kingo](#), CEO & Executive Director, United Nations Global Compact, originally posted on [GreenBiz](#) on 22 November 2019.

In a rapidly-shifting world, human rights have proven to be a grounding force for leaders of all kinds. In the face of political instability, rising inequalities and the climate crisis, no sector of society, including business, is immune to the turbulent environment we find ourselves in now. But concern about human rights violations should not just be seen as a response to places making headlines like Bolivia, Chile, Hong Kong SAR or Lebanon. When human rights are endangered anywhere, the impacts can spread everywhere.

According to the [Global Peace Index](#), violent conflict is the biggest obstacle to sustainable development, with the impact of violence on the global economy reaching more than US\$ 14.1 trillion in 2018 alone. And human rights grievances have been shown to lead to conflict and instability, including grievances raised by communities against the business operations that affect them.

While Governments are charged with promoting and protecting human rights, businesses must also meet minimum human rights responsibilities.

Today's most progressive business leaders, however, are going beyond minimum legal requirements and grounding their strategies and operations in the [Ten Principles of the United Nations Global Compact](#) on human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption.

Responsible business leaders also understand that stakeholder engagement is not just another tick-off exercise and take steps to meaningfully engage with and listen to affected communities.

Companies that respect human rights are sending a signal to consumers, investors and the public at large that they are a brand that is trustworthy and serious about sustainability. Beyond managing risk, businesses that proactively invest in human rights can contribute to a peaceful society and help create the conditions for inclusive prosperity.

Alongside public expectations, conflict and instability can also play a key role in shifting business strategies. Businesses are not independent of the communities in which they operate. In fact, according to our [latest survey of CEOs on sustainability](#), 63 per cent of surveyed business leaders say political uncertainty across markets is the most critical global issue for their companies' competitive strategies.

However, study after study has confirmed that the global business community is missing their opportunity to contribute to a peaceful, stable society by failing to meet human rights standards. Human rights violations remain widespread and, alarmingly, the renewables energy sector has seen a rapid rise in allegations of human rights abuse. [Half of the top](#) mineral extraction companies in Southern Africa have been accused of human rights abuses, from violating access to water and land rights to corruption, violence and deaths.

Further, the latest [UN Global Compact Progress Report](#) shows that a large human rights gap exists in the business world. For example, though 91 per cent of surveyed companies have a human rights policy in place, only 23 per cent conduct human rights risks assessments, and just 15 per cent conduct human rights impact assessments.

A recent [snapshot study](#) of the 20 largest German companies confirms these numbers: while companies may take the important step of publicly committing to respect human rights, many fall short when it comes to demonstrating that their grievance mechanisms are effective and that they have due diligence processes in place as required by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Similar studies exist for businesses in countries around the world.

Moreover, a persisting lack of transparency and public communication makes it difficult to hold companies accountable. [Only two out of 18 companies](#) active in the oil and gas sector in Uganda have publicly shared their human rights due diligence and community engagement efforts.

Across the board, meaningful action is not following stated commitments. Clearly, we have a lot of work to do to ensure accountability and make human rights due diligence go mainstream.

This makes next week's [UN Forum on Business and Human Rights](#) a crucial moment to explore how business can tackle interconnected challenges. At the Forum, the UN Global Compact, together with over twenty of its Local Networks, will bring together businesses from different political contexts around the world to share their unique experiences and jointly advance the human rights agenda.

Applying human rights principles to new trends and obstacles has proven to be a challenge for many companies. In response, and on the occasion of the annual Forum, we are launching a new report, [Navigating the Future of Business and Human Rights: Good Practice Examples](#).

The report provides expert guidance across seven major themes that should be top-of-mind for business leaders: the future of work, climate justice, effective remedy and grievance mechanisms, migrant rights, gender equality, due diligence and tackling working poverty.

Alongside development, human rights and peace are the founding pillars of the United Nations. And as we at the UN Global Compact have been advocating for nearly 20 years, human rights should also be the foundation for sustainable business. Now, as we commence a Decade of Action to deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we are committed to scaling up our support for business to make human rights a priority, and ensure that commitments are followed by meaningful, long-term actions. Let's raise the bar and accelerate true human rights leadership.

Contact



Ms. Lise Kingo

CEO & Executive Director

lise.kingo@unglobalcompact.org

+1 212 907 1301



Tweets by @globalcompact

UN Global Compact @globalcompact

What role does the private sector play in creating a sustainable future for all?

Join the [#SDGBizForum](#) on 23 Sept, a virtual dialogue co-hosted by [@ICCWBO](#), [@UNDESA](#) and [@globalcompact](#) on the final day of [#UnitingBusiness LIVE](#) at [#UNGA](#). Register now: [registration.unglobalcompact.org/website/15648/...](https://registration.unglobalcompact.org/website/15648/)



ICCC DESA United Nations Global Compact 20 years

Embed View on Twitter

FOLLOW US



QUICKLINKS

- The Ten Principles
- Sustainable Development Goals
- Our Participants
- All Our Work
- What You Can Do
- Careers & Opportunities
- Join Now
- Submit your CoP

Help us transform the world through business

CONTRIBUTE TODAY

SIGN UP FOR OUR BULLETIN

HAVE A QUESTION?

- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Contact Us](#)