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UN expert presents global standards for human rights in business world



John Ruggie

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A United Nations human rights expert today unveiled a series of global benchmarks aimed at helping businesses and governments to act ethically and protect human rights.

John Ruggie, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Business and Human Rights, presented the guidelines to the UN Human Rights Council, which is currently meeting in Geneva.

In a press release issued after his presentation, Mr. Ruggie said that “The principles seek to provide for the first time a global standard for preventing and addressing the risk of adverse human rights impacts linked to business activity, by outlining what States and business enterprises should do in practice.”

“They also give businesses predictability in what is expected of them, and provide other stakeholders, including civil society and investors, the tools to measure progress where it matters most – in the daily lives of people,” he said.

The 27-page document, the result of six years of effort, and based on visits to 20 countries, and online consultations with thousands of participants from 120 countries, contains dozens of recommendations. They include that:

States must protect against human rights abuses within their jurisdiction by third parties, including business enterprises.

States should take additional steps to protect against human rights abuses by business enterprises that are owned or controlled by the State.

Because the risk of gross human rights abuses is heightened in conflict-affected areas, States should help ensure that business enterprises operating in those contexts are not involved with such abuses.

The responsibility of business enterprises to respect human rights applies to all enterprises regardless of their size, sector, operational context, ownership and structure.

Business enterprises whose operations pose risks of severe human rights impacts should report formally on how they address them.

Where business enterprises identify that they have contributed to adverse impacts, they should provide remediation.

States must ensure that when abuses occur within their jurisdiction those affected have access to effective remedy.

States should ensure the effectiveness of domestic judicial mechanisms when addressing business-related human rights abuses.

In opening the annual conference earlier this month, Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said the meeting would focus on women's rights defenders, racism, and the relationship between human rights and business.

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