UN B-Tech Leadership Dialogue
Technology Executives in dialogue with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights:
The role of business leaders in advancing corporate respect for human rights

On 9th December 2021, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, engaged in dialogue with C-Suite executives from Apple, Cloudflare, Google, Ericsson, Hewlett Packard Enterprise, Meta, Microsoft, Salesforce, Verizon, and Vodafone.

The discussion focused on how this year's Human Rights Day theme "All Human, All Equal" can, and should, be embraced by technology industry executives in their own actions and decisions that concern the design, development and use of their companies' products and services.

As noted by the High Commissioner, "*We need to build more understanding of how you and your peers at the very top of some the world's largest companies, model and enable responsible corporate decision-making*".

Discussion focused on how top leadership across the tech industry can advance business respect for human rights consistent with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, specifically by:

1) Creating a corporate governance and culture that allows to ensure that risks to human rights connected to the design, development, and use of their products and services are identified and addressed. Questions explored included: How do/can executives
- ensure that human rights risks are accounted for when setting corporate strategy and investing in significant new ventures or business relationships?
- create and model a culture of openness and learning about the potential negative consequences of the company's technologies?
- hear, and act on, the perspectives of affected stakeholders and civil society on human rights issues connected to the company's products and services?

2) Advancing actions to tackle systemic issues underpinning the use of digital technologies in ways that harm human rights. Questions explored included: How can/do executives
- work alone or together to educate the public, civil society, regulators, and others working on responsible tech, including the UN about how specific technologies work and where functionalities could – without proper safeguards - be misused or abused to cause harm?
- play a pro-active role in establishing institutions and avenues for remedy for victims of harm related to their company's products and services?

Appreciating the opportunity of the dialogue, the High Commissioner highlighted the importance of finding ways for more stakeholders – from across civil society, government, and indeed so-called laggards in the industry – to have the opportunity to engage with technology executives directly.

The insights from this dialogue will feed directly into the ongoing work of the UN Human Rights B-Tech Project, through its Tech Company Community of Practice and multi-stakeholder processes to which all participating executives reaffirmed their commitment.

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Through a number of initiatives, the [Business and Human Rights Unit](#) at OHCHR leads the business and human rights agenda within the UN system. The B-Tech Project is one such initiative of the Business and Human Rights Unit. A multi-stakeholder endeavor, B-Tech provides authoritative guidance and resources for implementing the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) in the technology space. In 2019, UN Human Rights launched the project after consultations with civil society, business, States, and other experts about the scope of the prospective Project.

The tech company [Community of Practice](#) (COP) is an initiative of the B-Tech Project dedicated to advancing business respect for human rights in the technology industry. It exists to inform B-Tech Project guidance and recommendations on human rights due diligence related to end-use and access to remedy in the technology industry and to advance practical understanding and capacity among technology companies to implement respect for human rights through a) creating a safe, confidential space to exchange practices and challenges; and b) facilitating tech company engagement with leading responsible business and human rights experts. COP insights are shared publicly in the form of short briefing notes, blogs, and non- attributable case studies, and dilemma scenarios. In 2021, the following companies participated in the COP: Apple, Cisco, Cloudflare, Ericsson, Google, Hewlett Packard Enterprise, Meta, Microsoft, Salesforce, Twitter, Verizon, and Vodafone.

The UN [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#), unanimously endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council in 2011 (resolution 17/4), provide the authoritative global standard for action to safeguard human rights in a business context, clarifying what is expected by governments and companies to prevent and address impacts on human rights arising from business activity.

For further information and media requests, please write to ohchr-b-techproject@un.org

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