**Forum on Business and Human Rights. Introductory remarks by Mrs. Bente Angell-Hansen, Secretary General of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Geneva, 4.12.12.**

**Introduction**

The uniqueness of the Guiding Principles was eloquently addressed in the opening session this morning. Also, the process leading to the Guiding Principles was unique. It was inclusive, it was facts-based, persistent and it was credible. I want to particularly thank professor Ruggie and his team who spearheaded this work.

I believe that we all agree that what counts now is “implementation, implementation and implementation.” To succeed we need political commitment and leadership at all levels.

**The state duty to protect**

Let me underline two things regarding the state duty to protect human rights:

First, the state duty to protect includes protecting against violations by third parties, such as businesses.

And secondly, the duty applies to *all* institutions of state. This is not a minor point. It is central to the state duty to protect. It is the policies and practices of state institutions – at all levels of government – that contributes to ensuring the protection of human rights, in concrete terms.

Protection and implementation must reach all people, regardless of gender, ethnic or religious belonging or political affiliation. This is not only right, but it is also smart economics.

All parts of government have a duty to implement the Guiding Principles within their substantive jurisdiction, whether as policy maker, owner of business enterprises, regulator, public procurer, investor or, purchaser.

**Challenge: Coherence**

In light of this, a key challenge for the Government is to make sure that business are facing a comprehensive and coherent incentive structure when investing and managing their business activities, both at home and abroad.

This requires coherent government policies.I think that this is something we all face, in some way or another.

In order to respond to this challenge, Norway has established an inter-departmentalgroup to promote the implementation of the Guiding Principles.

As mentioned by Professor Ruggie in his statement, it is essential that the mix of policy and legal measures sends clear and consistent signals to the business community. Let me highlight that Norway has one of the world’s most far reaching extraterritorial jurisdictions covering such important challenges as corruption, trafficking, slavery, the ICC statutes, and ILO conventions.

**Government expectations**

An example of the Norwegian Government’s strategy in this field is its policy towardsstate-owned or partly state-owned companies. A focus on these companies is an effective strategy to set the standard among Norwegian enterprises in general.

A recent White Paper has defined the Government’s expectations towards state-owned companies with regard to human rights, labour rights and decent work, transparency and anti-corruption, both at home and abroad.

The State’s owner dialogue with the individual companies is the most important tool in this respect. In this dialogue the Government’s expectations with regard to human rights, transparency and anti-corruption, decent work and labour rights and environment and climate are made clear.

The Government expects state-owned companies to respect human rights in all their activities, including in their relations with suppliers and business partners.

Companies in which the state owns shares are also expected to respect and promote decent working conditions which safeguard fundamental labour standards, and give workers a decent wage.

The state expects companies to have guidelines, routines and operating procedures to follow-up the Guiding Principles. This is closely linked to risk assessments, risk-management and risk mitigation.

Mr Chairman,

Another key element of our strategy is the ethical guidelines to safeguard human rights in the Norwegian Government’s Pension Funds’ investments abroad.

This Fund consists of the government revenues from the Norwegian petroleum production, and it is one of the worlds’ biggest sovereign wealth funds.

A Council on Ethics advices the Ministry of Finance on the investment profile of the Fund, based on the Fund’s ethical guidelines.

According to these guidelines, the Fund should not invest in companies that contribute to serious or systematic human rights violations.

The Ministry of Finance makes the decision on exclusion of companies from the Government Pension Fund’s investment universe based on recommendations from the Council.

Mr. Chairman

The consensus on the Guiding Principles has strengthened awareness and cooperation on human rights among different stakeholders.

For my Government it is important to have close contact with both companies and civil society and to learn from their experiences.

For this purpose we have established a multi-stakeholder network. This network facilitates information between different stakeholders and is an advisory group to the government on issues related to CSR.

National operationalization of the Guiding Principles is singled out as one of the key issues for consideration this year by the network.

**Dissemination of the GP**

What have we done to disseminate information about the Guiding Principles? I will mention a few examples:

In September we organised a regional conference on mining and indigenous peoples’ rights in the Barents region. The Guiding Principles were the reference for the discussion – adapted to the mining sector, and in particular for companies with activities in indigenous peoples` territories.

Two weeks ago the Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized the ‘Oslo Conference on Corporate Social Responsibility’. The conference attracted approximately 500 representatives from all stakeholder groups and around 45 countries.

One aim of the Oslo conference was to identify best practices that support implementation of the Guiding Principles, but also to learn from past mistakes.

Mr. Chairman, a few words in conclusion

The Guiding Principles give us the direction and the tools. We – the states – have to put the tools to use.

It is the results on the ground that matter. There exists a huge deficit on implementation.

And when we are to evaluate the effect of the Guiding Principles it is the concrete results on the ground and what they mean to people that really counts.

I have come across dire examples during my travels. Medicines that have been diluted rendering them inactive and causing unnecessary death.

Least developed countries in transition and in strong need of income, but where companies have acquired many years tax waiver.

But it is precisely these examples that render this work so meaningful.

It is precisely such examples that make it an imperative to redouble our joint efforts to promote the Guiding Principles in practice.