

Business and Human Rights – UN Forum
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- Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to this impressive gathering.
- Indeed, the turnout at this event is strong evidence of the excellent progress that has been made to advance human rights in business over the past decade or two. The people in the room are both testament to this progress, and also catalysts of great change.
- This is genuinely important, since human rights will be much more firmly on the global agenda when it they are firmly on the business agenda.
- We also know that the Guiding Principles have been a game changer.
- It is also important to note that while there has been great progress, there remains significant work to do to ensure that human rights are part of every decision that a company makes, in other words, that human rights has a seat at the table.
- We at BSR conducted a survey in conjunction with our annual conference last month, in partnership with Globescan. And human rights was named as the number one challenge outlined by the more than 700 sustainability or CSR executives surveyed.
- To put my comments in context, my views are based on the work that my organization, BSR, does with leaders in many industries on integrating human rights into their core business. Examples include one on one work with companies; a human rights working group of 30 companies across different sectors; industry-based groups focused on labor issues in the supply chain; and multi-stakeholder efforts like the co-facilitation that resulted in the launch of GNI.

- And having worked in this area for some time, it has been incredibly gratifying to see things, like lively dialogue in Myanmar between former members of the military junta and former political prisoners, and including business, that would have been impossible not that long ago.
- And while much progress has been made, many more companies need to get on board. While a great many companies have adopted human rights policies, they remain a small minority.
- I'd like to outline four steps where progress is needed over the coming years.
- Step one is for companies to come and listen I would like to see the next UN Business Forum on Human Rights with 33% of the participants coming from business. These discussions work best when they not only talk *about* business, they talk *with* business.
- Step two is to move human rights further into core business operations. In our work advising companies on human rights, we are working with but also beyond “the usual suspects” with departments like legal, marketing, procurement, M&A, etc. This is a real step forward.
- Step three is to look to build systemic change. Human rights and business issues are almost always a result of multiple failures by multiple actors (bad laws, weak enforcement, ineffective global governance systems, corruption, lack of transparency, misaligned incentives, etc). They can only be fixed with all actors collaborating: government, business, civil society, labor. Business must do what it can, and work with others to address what it cannot do alone.
- Step four is to look at the intersection of human rights with business innovation. Too often these things have been disconnected (e.g., the development of global supply chains, new technologies, etc.). Key here is to look at technology in particular, and not only ICT. Advances in biotechnology will raise new ethical questions. Commercialized drones raise many new questions. As such innovations – which are what business do best – are brought to

market, the human rights implications of such breakthroughs should be through through.

- Finally, I want to echo Mary's call to look at the intersection of human rights and climate. The climate challenge is essentially a human challenge: how do we maintain progress towards more inclusive prosperity.
- With the world's eyes on a potential agreement at COP-21 in Paris in 24 months, we will be successful if we also see this as part of the human rights agenda.
- Ultimately, Human rights are good business. Without respect for human rights, business can't succeed; we can't solve the world's most pressing challenges, and we won't build inclusive prosperity.
- Thank you very much for your time and attention.