



NEXT DECADE | 10+

**BUSINESS AND
HUMAN RIGHTS**
UN GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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**Remarks delivered at the closing plenary, 2020 UN Forum on Business and Human Rights,
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(As received)

Anita Ramasastry

On behalf of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights – Dante, Surya, Githu, Elzbieta and myself – I am pleased to conclude the ninth annual UN Forum. While travel restrictions meant that we could not be together in person this year, we thank you for tuning in all over the world to help us continue this important annual dialogue.

Thank you to the interpreters, the tech team and to the Working Group Secretariat for their dedication and teamwork in preparing the first virtual forum.

Fuzzy slippers and home-made coffee in a fake espresso cup have made me feel like I am in Geneva.

We thank all stakeholders who participated as speakers or participants: more than 4,000 participants from 140 countries, and reportedly 30% registered from the private sector, 8% from government, 24% from civil society.

A special thanks for your understanding and good humour as we dealt with the added technical challenges that come with our new reality. And an extra thanks to all of our speakers and moderators, who not only shared their expert insights but also their persistent patience and a beautiful array of virtual backgrounds.

Special thanks to the humans rights defenders, indigenous leaders, and voices from the field who reminded us of the harsh impact of the pandemic on rights-holders worldwide – from migrant workers who suffered during the lockdown without wages and resources, to

essential workers, toiling in factories and not having even masks to shield them from a deadly virus.

Our theme this year has been: “Preventing business-related human rights abuses: The key to a sustainable future for people and planet.”

I would like to share a few key messages we heard on this theme, and then Dante will share with you the way forward as we move towards the 10th anniversary of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

A fireside chat at the closing plenary was appropriate. The fire is raging: the world is burning, we are in the midst of fighting multiple crises – from climate change, to economic meltdown, to the raging inferno of a global pandemic, to the fiery scourge of racism – so if we cannot make progress with respect to addressing how business engages in terms of respect for human rights, as we attempt to rebuild, when can we? If we don’t want to deploy tools of prevention in the future, we are dooming ourselves to a world of future devastation.

Some key takeaways:

- **The UN Guiding Principles are a guidepost in times of crisis.** We face many crises, now and ahead, including the COVID-19 crisis, the climate crisis, and the crisis of continued racism across the world. These challenges have shown the fragility of systems that do not put people’s fundamental welfare and dignity at the centre. If we are to be truly “future fit,” we need to keep the focus on human rights as we recover from these crises and combat them going forward.
- **Our future is one of mandatory measures.** We now have a strong evidence-base telling us that voluntary measures aren’t getting us where we need to be. Trade unions, civil society groups, and others have tirelessly advocated for binding measures at the national, regional, and international levels. Companies and investors increasingly agree, calling for unified approaches that level the playing field and position human rights due diligence as a competitive advantage. There is broad agreement that mandatory measures should be based on the UN Guiding Principles and rights-holders should have seats at the table as measures are developed. **And to States – we can’t wait forever in terms of levelling the playing field.**
- **Impacts on the planet are impacts on people.** Environmental and human rights efforts are often siloed. This has to change. Our integration of these issues is indispensable for a sustainable future. Former Irish President Mary Robinson emphasized a key way to do this when she called for direct work with human rights defenders at the local level, as “they understand the link between the environment, development, and rights.”
- **The future is financial.** There is now a stronger focus on the responsibility and accountability of investors, development finance institutions, and commercial banks under the UNGPs. As stated by the IOE, the UNGPs provide “a chain reaction” by clarifying that financial actors also have a responsibility to respect human rights throughout their core activities.

- **The future is data driven.** The latest results from the Corporate Human Rights Benchmark challenge us all to do better. Out of the 230 companies assessed, 79 scored *zero* for human rights due diligence. We also heard how we still need better and more consistent data to drive meaningful human rights practices and put outcomes for people at the centre.
- **Governance and business models are key.** Human rights need to be embedded into the very DNA of every company. Responsible business is resilient business, and we cannot make true progress unless human rights are integrated into how companies are owned and grown.
- **Remedy is one of our most important tools for prevention.** Remedy is not only reactive. It helps stop further harms, influences improvements in corporate practices, and has the potential to improve relationships by recognizing what's gone wrong and putting it right. We must always remember Pillar 3 of the UNGPs and centre effective remedy across efforts.

Finally, “smart mix” is no longer a breakfast cereal. It is more like a more balanced diet as we progress with regulation and mandatory due diligence.

Over to you, Dante, on next steps.

Dante Pesce

All of these themes, and more, have been instrumental inputs into our ongoing “UNGP 10+” project to take stock of the first 10 years of the UN Guiding Principles and develop an evidence-based roadmap for the decade ahead. Thank you for these valuable contributions.

We would like to reiterate our call for your continued engagement with the project and invite you to submit your written inputs. Please visit the [Working Group's website](#), and our [project portal graciously hosted by the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre](#), for more details.

We will be launching the roadmap for next decade on the 16th of June next year – the official 10-year anniversary of the UN Guiding Principles. Please join us then, as well as at next year's annual Forum.

Back to you, Anita, to close us out.

Anita Ramasastry

We have had nearly a decade of collective efforts to “walk the UNGPs talk”. In the decade ahead, let us now “run the talk” by creatively forging radical collaborations and setting new records in the race toward a world in which business is done with respect for human rights. Thank you.