



Fair and Fast Transition to Renewable Energy? Securing respect for human rights in renewable energy

Wednesday 16 November, 0820-0940h, Room XXIII

Renewable energy is now a dynamic business sector that offers almost all countries important possibilities for economic growth and job creation, climate change mitigation, and energy security. The renewable energy market is growing at a remarkable pace: investment in renewables has grown six-fold since 2004 and is forecast to overtake coal as the largest source of energy globally by the early 2030s. The renewable sector's recent growth has been driven not only by rising energy consumption which, on current projections, will increase by 56% between 2010 and 2014, mostly through increased consumption in non-OECD countries. It is also attributable to wider adoption of cleaner energy policies by governments and the private sector, including commitments undertaken at the 2015 COP 21 climate summit, via the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, as well as growing public, civil society and investor concern over climate change and other impacts of traditional "black" energy sources (oil, natural gas and coal).

Much of the attention paid to the renewable energy sector so far has focused on its role as a leading technology of business and social adaptation to a new, low-carbon world. As such, renewable energy businesses are often juxtaposed against traditional energy companies. The potential of renewable energy to address the pressing global concerns of climate change and energy security have sometimes encouraged a perception that the sector comes with an inherent social licence to operate and that renewable energy investments, companies and their operations do not involve the complexity, conflict, and human rights concerns too often associated with the extractive industries over recent decades.

In reality, however, the social and human rights risks linked to renewable energy projects can be as profound as those of extractive or infrastructure projects. For example, on-shore wind farms have been reported to impact negatively on rural or indigenous communities in various countries, and production processes for solar technologies may generate pollutants harmful to human health and the environment. The sustainability of the renewable energy sector now and in the longer term turn on the ability of upstream and downstream companies to identify and effectively address human rights and social risks and address these, including with reference to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Given current and projected levels of investment in renewable energy generation, the human rights of large numbers of individuals and communities are critically dependent on the collective ability of renewable energy companies, investors, companies and civil society to cooperate to achieve of this outcome.

The renewable energy sector and other leading players in the global energy transformation, including development finance institutions, private banks and public investors, export credit and insurance agencies and other government bodies such as environmental agencies, can use their leadership and leverage to promote respect for human rights by:

- Providing appropriate and effective regulatory and policy frameworks for renewable energy investments and operations
- Developing and promoting good practices and solutions for businesses in the renewables sector
- Using their leverage to secure respect for human rights in global supply chains that support renewable energy production
- Working in partnership with peers, rights-holders and other stakeholders to identify and implement appropriate responses to human rights risks within the sector.



Aims and Objectives

This session will seek to identify opportunities and challenges for leadership and leverage in securing respect for human rights in the renewable energy sector in the context of the current global transition to sustainable energy. The overall aims and objectives of the session are to:

- Emphasise the relevance of the UN Guiding Principles for the fast-growing renewable energy sector
- Highlight the human rights issues relevant to the renewables sector including supply chain as well as operational impacts
- Encourage increased multi-stakeholder collaboration to address human rights impacts associated with renewables sector
- Explore links and synergies between UNGPs and SDGs in relation to renewable energy
- Explore human rights responsibilities and responses of public and private investors in renewable energy sector and scope for exercise of greater investor leadership and leverage

Key discussion questions

- What measures should be taken by government, business and other stakeholders to ensure the transition to low-carbon energy production respects fundamental human rights, including those of communities affected by renewable energy operations and supply chain workers?
- How can investors help safeguard human rights in the rush to “go green”? What synergies are there between government and business efforts to implement the UNGPs, on one hand, and the SDGs, on the other, in connection with renewable energy generation?
- What can we learn from past experiences of renewables, black energy and extractives projects about the costs of failures to implement human rights due diligence; and how to improve safeguards and remedy mechanisms for human rights in the renewables sector in future?

Panel

Moderator: Mr. Phil Bloomer, Executive Director, Business and Human Rights Resource Centre

Panel:

- Mr. Albert Barume, Chair, UN Expert Mechanism on Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Dr. France Bourgoïn, Head of Responsible Sourcing, DONG Energy
- Ms. Jelena Stamenkova van Rump, Responsible Investment Advisor, PGGM Investments
- Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The session will take the form of a facilitated panel discussion aimed at emphasising different points of view on issues of human rights and renewables from different stakeholders on the panel. The session will include two segments of interactive Q & A with the audience, after the first two speakers and after the fourth speaker.

Organisers: [DONG Energy](#) and the [Danish Institute for Human Rights](#)