

2nd UN South Asia Forum on Business and Human Rights

18-20 March 2019

Kathmandu, Nepal

Concept Note

Background

The [Inaugural UN South Asia Forum on Business and Human Rights](#) – held in New Delhi, India, on 14-15 March 2019 – brought together over 200 participants representing over 90 organisations from 16 countries. This regional forum was aimed at raising awareness about business and human rights issues in South Asia and facilitating the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), including through national action plans. Building on the success of the Inaugural UN South Asia Forum, the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights (UNWG) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are co-organising the 2nd UN South Asia Forum on Business and Human Rights in Kathmandu, Nepal, on 18-20 March 2020.

The UNWG, in collaboration with other partners, has been promoting the effective dissemination and implementation of the UNGPs in different world regions, including by organising regional events to foster races to the top. The annual South Asia Forum is part of this wider engagement strategy.

Business and human rights in South Asia

Endorsed unanimously by the Human Rights Council in June 2011, the UNGPs provide the authoritative global framework for the respective duties and responsibilities of Governments and business enterprises to prevent and address business-related human rights abuses. They also offer a blueprint for how business respect for human rights can support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in line with international human rights standards.

South Asia has made an encouraging progress in implementing UNGPs in the recent past: India launched the zero draft of its [National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights](#) and released the [National Guidelines for Responsible Business Conduct](#) in early 2019; Pakistan started the process of developing its [National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights](#); the Governments of Nepal and the Maldives are considering including sections on business and human rights in their National Action Plans on Human Rights. Non-state initiatives to promote the implementation of the UNGPs, including by the private sector, are underway in several States, including Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Moreover, South Asian Governments, in collaboration with businesses, are taking various measures to achieve the SDGs.

However, despite all the progress achieved through government and private sector initiatives, the South Asia region continues to experience significant adverse human rights impacts of business activities, with continuing barriers to access to effective remedies. South Asia remains home to the largest number of working children in the world, and the exploitation of migrant workers from the region is well-documented. Supply chains of apparel, agribusiness, electronics, automobiles, construction, and manufacturing industries extend far within several South Asian countries, exposing workers to unsafe working conditions and labour rights abuses. Human rights defenders continue to face attacks, reprisals and criminalisation in South Asia, including for opposing extraction of natural resources without meaningful consultations with affected communities. Gender discrimination and gender-based violence remain rampant in the region. Developments in artificial intelligence, automation and robotics raise serious questions about potential impacts on human rights and the future of work. Last but not least, the negative impacts of fast economic growth on the environment and climate change are becoming quite alarming.

Given the multitude of business and human rights challenges as well as different levels of progress in implementing the UNGPs, it is critical for all relevant stakeholders – including Governments, national human rights institutions (NHRIs), businesses, industry associations, trade unions, civil society organisations (CSOs), and academia – to work together to prevent, mitigate and remediate adverse impact of business activities on human rights. Doing so will contribute to achieving inclusive and sustainable development in South Asia. It is in this context that the UNWG and UNDP are organising the 2nd UN South Asia Forum to highlight key business and human rights issues as well as identify opportunities for effective implementation of the UNGPs in the region.

Objectives

- To raise awareness and build the capacity of various stakeholders around business and human rights standards, especially the UNGPs;
- To take stock of the key challenges, opportunities and progress made in South Asia in implementing the UNGPs, including through the development of national action plans;
- To explore linkages in the implementation of the UNGPs and the 2030 Agenda; and
- To encourage peer-learning amongst States, NHRIs, businesses, industry associations, trade unions and CSOs in South Asia, facilitating the regional exchange of good practices in implementing the UNGPs and the SDGs.

Programme

The programme of the 2nd UN South Asia Forum will be developed in consultation with the relevant stakeholders. The following is a tentative list of issues that the organisers intend to feature in the programme:

- General introduction to the UNGPs;
- Potential pathways to implement the UNGPs through national action plans in South Asia;
- Learning lessons from other countries with a national action plan (e.g., Thailand);
- Achieving policy coherence between realising human rights and promoting trade/investment (e.g., state-owned enterprises, trade/investment agreements, foreign direct investment and special economic zones);
- Linkages between the UNGPs, the right to development and the 2030 Agenda;
- BHR and sustainable finance;
- Gender dimensions of BHR (including sexual harassment and gender-based violence);

- Occupational safety and health at the workplace;
- Protecting the rights of migrant workers and workers in the informal sector;
- BHR challenges faced by small and medium-sized enterprises;
- Environmental pollution and climate change;
- Human rights due diligence, including environmental/social impact assessment;
- Managing sector-specific human rights impacts (e.g., extractive, manufacturing, agriculture, textile, electronics, technology, ship-breaking, tourism, hydropower, and infrastructure);
- The role of CSOs, human rights defenders, trade unions and NHRIs in promoting business respect for human rights;
- Access to remedy and corporate accountability.

Forum format

The 2nd UN South Asia Forum will be organised over 3 days (18-20 March 2020), with the first day (18 March) devoted to providing safe space to various stakeholders to facilitate conversation under the [Chatham House Rule](#). The organisers aim to hold dedicated sessions for CSOs, businesses and NHRIs. In addition, there will be some space and opportunities for external partners to organise side events, workshops, consultations or meetings during the Forum. Those who are interested in organising such events, please indicate your interest with a 1-page concept note outlining the theme, objectives, format and proposed panellists latest by 31 January 2020. A draft programme of the Forum will be available in early February 2020.

Practical information

The 2nd UN South Asia Forum is organised jointly by the UNWG and UNDP. [Registration](#) closes 3 March 2020 (11.59 p.m. Kathmandu time). An automated e-mail will be sent confirming receipt of the request. The Forum secretariat will review all applications. Confirmation of successful registration will be sent to approved delegates within one week of registration. Participants are responsible for arranging travel logistics (including visas) and expenses.

Queries related to programme, sessions, speakers, participation, side events, etc.:

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