

**Cooperation through Education, Research & Dialogue - The Role of Academic Institutions  
as Multipliers of the Global BHR Agenda**

Concept Note for the  
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**Organisers**

BHRIGHT Network, here represented by Copenhagen Business School (Denmark) and EDHEC Business School (France), and the University of Seville (Spain)

EBHR - Business and Human Rights Project of the University of Essex (UK)

CALS – Centre for Applied Legal Studies of University of Witwatersrand (South Africa)

School of Law, City University of Hong Kong (China)

E-dh - Entreprises pour Les Droits de l'Homme (France)

HOMA – Human Rights and Business Centre of the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (Brazil)

Teaching Business & Human Rights Forum

## I. Background

Academic institutions could play an influential role in defining the business and human rights (BHR) agenda through their teaching and research activities as well as by being facilitators of a dialogue between states, business enterprises, affected people and communities, NGOs and other stakeholders. This Session will explore multiple facets of the said theme.

### 1. Education

In the last decade or so, more and more educational institutions have started teaching BHR either as a full-fledged course or as part of courses on business ethics, corporate social responsibility, or human rights and globalisation. Out of several examples reflecting this trend, two initiatives designed to mobilize academic resources deserve mention here. The first is the Teaching Business and Human Rights Forum hosted at Columbia University in New York City that provides a platform for collaboration among more than 200 individuals teaching BHR courses at some 115 institutions worldwide. Another example is The BHRIGHT Initiative, which was established in March 2013 at an international academic workshop held at Copenhagen Business School and which convenes more than 20 academics of various disciplines (law, management, economy, philosophy) in a joint effort to produce interdisciplinary course syllabi and material. A further important initiative is Homa, the Human Rights and Business Centre from Federal University of Juiz de Fora, Brazil. With support from the Ford Foundation, it identifies still unexplored academic space for the production of qualified knowledge about the most difficult and relevant aspects involving the violation of human rights by companies.

Despite these and other initiatives, BHR issues do not yet prominently figure in management education curricula (or at law schools or business schools generally). One explanation for this may be that educational institutions need to be convinced to dedicate additional resources to enable the integration of BHR topics into curricula. Speakers at this session will highlight additional challenges. The first is to deal with the interdisciplinary nature of the subject. It could be that teaching on the interface between management and human rights remains relatively underdeveloped, because it tends to be performed along traditional disciplinary divides, for example by addressing the topic from either a legal or from a business studies perspective, often underestimating the importance of yet other disciplines such as science, political science or international development for the topic. In particular, we see a need to develop better strategies to reach management studies, because managers (and organizational scholars who either do research or perhaps more importantly teach future managers) are often not adequately aware of the human rights implications of managerial decision-making. A second challenge results from the decisively practice-orientated approach towards the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). Teaching efforts that refer to the UNGPs should be enhanced by being informed by people in the field, for example managers or representatives of civil society, who can identify problems related to the implementation of human rights respect into managerial routines throughout the organization. Therefore, teaching BHR requires intensification of collaborative approaches between academic institutions, business and civil society organizations. Finally, another important issue is the global nature of the subject which calls for more cross-continental collaboration.

## 2. Research

Research has a critical role to play in finding theoretical as well as practical solutions to multiple complex challenges that arise with the intersection of business with human rights. For example, scholars could assist states in devising initiatives to regulate effectively corporate activities as well as advise business enterprises on how to discharge their responsibility to respect human rights. Academic institutions could produce studies with the help of partnerships with other academic institutions, civil society organizations, as well as by integration of the testimony of victims of human rights violations. Such studies could help increase the accountability of business enterprises.

Academic institutions, including those who coordinate this event, have been developing research on various fronts such as the identification of judicial and non-judicial mechanisms capable of giving greater effectiveness to the accountability of business enterprises for human rights violations; case studies on human rights violations by companies; monitoring the implementation of the UNGP and reflections about a binding treaty on Human Rights and Business. A sensitive issue concerns the creation of suitable databases and the development of convincing methodologies that could help realize the promise of the UNGPs' due diligence-based responsibility of business enterprises.

Nevertheless, research on BHR issues faces similar difficulties as does the teaching of the subject, such as the subject's interdisciplinary nature or the need for resources that would support global-collaboration projects. Underdeveloped publication opportunities for the dissemination of interdisciplinary BHR research operate as another limitation. This limitation though should be addressed to some extent with Cambridge University Press launching a new dedicated journal, *Business and Human Rights Journal*, in November 2015.

## 3. Facilitators of dialogue with stakeholders

The independence, expertise, and capacity building objective of academic institutions puts them in a unique position to facilitate a dialogue about BHR issues with all kinds of stakeholders. Academic institutions could or are already collaborating with companies, NGOs, affected communities and States, for example to identify solutions for the problem of business-related human rights violations, or to carry out the debate about a BHR treaty (Homa, for example, belongs to a network working on the Business and Human Rights TreatyProject that brings together more than 600 organizations all over the world). Regarding the role of academic institutions and members of the academic community, many open issues remain. There are to date several academic centres around the world that deal with BHR questions, which raises the question of whether or not and to which extent they could coordinate their activities for better impact. A further issue concerns the possible and legitimate scope of academic advisory services. It is also necessary to define the appropriate context in which students can be engaged in the dialogue process. For example, business

schools could use executive education formats in order to involve management in a dialogue about human rights responsibilities of business organizations.

## **II. Format**

The side event will be in the form of an interactive dialogue, beginning with the panelists briefly sharing their experiences and ideas and then moving on to discussion of potential opportunities and promising developments. Questions will be posed to the participants and an open dialogue will be encouraged.

Following the presentation by panelists, the Working Group on Business and Human Rights of the Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME) will introduce the discussion with a progress update of their mission. The Working Group is represented by Ambassador David Scheffer, UN Secretary-General's Special Expert on United Nations Assistance to the Khmer Rouge Trials, Mayer Brown/Robert A. Helman Professor of Law, Director, Center for International Human Rights Northwestern University School of Law and by Caroline Kaeb, Assistant professor of Business Law and Human Rights, University of Connecticut.

## **III. Objectives**

This Session aims to:

- examine the role of academic institutions in assisting various stakeholders to deal with complex BHR issues;
- provide networking opportunities for individuals teaching and researching business and human rights issues in diverse regions and academic and practice-oriented environments;
- explore gaps in management as well as legal education with regard to teaching BHR;
- address regional specificities in management and legal education and their possible impact on teaching BHR in a holistic manner
- stress the need for including academic institutions in national action plans (NAPs) as actors to promote knowledge on human rights with firms and other economic actors; and

## **IV. Target Audience**

- Anyone who teaches, researches or is interested in teaching BHR in academic institutions;
- Business managers that deal with human rights in business enterprises and that provide in-house training on human rights issues;

- Representatives of civil society organizations that seek to inform and influence the BHR agenda;
- Government officials and other stakeholders involved in NAPs and with an interest in how NAPs may serve to promote BHR knowledge among managers.

## V. Panel

### Moderator

**Björn Fasterling**, Professor, Legal EDHEC Research Center, EDHEC Business School (France), BHRIGHT Network [bjorn.fasterling@edhec.edu](mailto:bjorn.fasterling@edhec.edu)

### Speakers

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**Surya Deva**, Associate Professor, School of Law, City University of Hong Kong; Editor-in-Chief, *Business and Human Rights Journal*: [suryad@cityu.edu.hk](mailto:suryad@cityu.edu.hk)

**Françoise Guichard**, Director of ethics and compliance at Engie (GdF-Suez), President of Entreprises pour les droits de l'homme (France), [francoise.guichard@gdfsuez.com](mailto:francoise.guichard@gdfsuez.com)

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