Category: Obligations Relating to Non-State Actors

Sub-Category: Implementation of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights

Name of Good Practice: European Union’s Implementation of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to Protect the Environment

Key Words: Corporations, Guidelines, Guiding Principles, Human Rights-Based Assessments, Impact Assessment

Implementing Actors: International Organisation: European Union (EU); Nation States: EU Member States

Location: Europe

Description: **​** The EU 2011 Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy endorsed the Guiding Principles. EU institutions and EU member States have made commitments and efforts to support their implementation relating to activities that may impact on the environment. For example, the European Commission (EC) has prepared sector guidelines on implementing the Guiding Principles, including for the oil and gas industry. The guidelines for the oil and gas industry set out what the Guiding Principles expect from companies operating internationally, including in the assessment of human rights impacts, the monitoring and tracking of performance, and remediation and grievance mechanisms. Under the category of assessing human rights impacts, the EC guidelines provide details on the content of an assessment, stakeholder consultation, and impacts on groups in vulnerable positions, such as indigenous peoples and women.

In its 2011-2014 strategy for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the EC invited each of the member States of the European Union to develop a plan for national implementation of the UN Guiding Principles. Some of these plans address environmental impacts on human rights. For example, the Danish plan, submitted in September 2013, describes guidelines published by the Danish Council on CSR (an advisory body created by the Danish government) for sustainable supply chain management to ensure that suppliers meet social and environmental requirements and expectations. The United Kingdom plan, also submitted in September 2013, sets out the government’s commitment to implement the Guiding Principles by ensuring “that agreements facilitating investment overseas by UK or EU companies incorporate the business responsibility to respect human rights, and do not undermine the host country’s ability to either meet its international human rights obligations or to impose the same environmental and social regulation on foreign investors as it does on domestic firms.”

Further Information: More information is available on the EC webpage on business and human rights: <http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sustainable-business/corporate-social-responsibility/human-rights/>; the UK National Implementation Plan is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/236901/BHR_Action_Plan_-_final_online_version_1_.pdf>.