

## Call for Businesses input

### Working Group on Business and Human Rights Report to the 50<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council on *“COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learnt and moving forward”*

#### Introduction

The pandemic and the related severe socioeconomic consequences have been a test of leadership and service delivery for governments and businesses alike. It has highlighted existing inequalities, exacerbated them, and showed that protection of human rights is especially critical in times of crisis. This period has served as a reminder that, in times of crisis, human rights protection can be compromised leaving millions of people and communities vulnerable, in situations of fear and abuse, exposed to danger and the real risk of death.

The pandemic has demonstrated that to effectively protect human rights under such crisis conditions, standards and protection measures must not only be maintained but significantly strengthened. It is critical for States, businesses, and all stakeholders to learn the lessons of the pandemic and take all appropriate practical measures to limit the human cost of future crises and achieve solutions that save lives and protect human rights, even when crisis cannot be averted. The pandemic has been a human rights crisis of immense proportions, but it should also be a wake-up-call and trigger for States, the international community and business to take the necessary action that is commensurate to the challenge.

The United Nations’ Working Group on Business and Human Rights (the Working Group) repeatedly emphasised what is required from all relevant stakeholders to ensure responsible business conduct during the pandemic and in the recovery period<sup>1</sup>.

Against this background, the Working Group decided to focus its forthcoming report to the 50<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council in June 2022 on the lessons learnt from

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<sup>1</sup> Including in the recommendations of the Working Group’s Information Note “A Roadmap for Responsible Recovery in Times of Crisis” (<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Business/WG/Responsible-recovery-information-note.pdf>), the statement of the Working Group “Ensuring that business respects human rights during the Covid-19 crisis and beyond: The relevance of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights” (<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25837&LangID=E>), as well as in other relevant work by human rights mechanisms and bodies, such as Special Procedures, Treaty Bodies as well as the OHCHR (<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Business/BusinessAndHR-COVID19.pdf>).

the pandemic and the identification of opportunities and challenges related to protection, prevention, response, and redress for business-related human rights abuses based on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). It seeks to consider how the business and human rights agenda can contribute to efforts to build back better following the pandemic, and to address emerging new global crises on the horizon.

### **Call for inputs**

The Working Group kindly requests that your company provides its input by responding to the below attached questions to [ohchr-wg-business@un.org](mailto:ohchr-wg-business@un.org) by **24 February 2022**. Please indicate “**WG BHR - COVID-19 / Business**” in the email subject line; limit your contributions to a maximum of 2,500 words and if necessary, provide links to relevant documents or attach annexes.

Unless indicated otherwise, the responses received will be posted on the Working Group’s webpage in the language in which they are received.

The Working Group issued separate calls with similar questionnaires to States, businesses and business associations, unions, national human rights institutions, and UN entities.

### **Questions:**

- 1) What were the most significant challenges and obstacles for your company during the pandemic and the recovery period related to implementing the corporate responsibility to respect human rights in the context of business activities? What kind of support or/and guidance would your company welcome to implement better the UNGPs in other, future crises?
- 2) What were the most important lessons learnt by your company from the crisis and how can these lessons help in preventing business-related human rights abuses linked to other future crises?
- 3) How did your company identify the most salient human rights issues in your sector and your operating contexts and then prevent and mitigate the impacts that proved to be the most severe?
- 4) How did your company implement the UNGPs, i.e. by developing human rights due diligence policies, identifying, preventing, mitigating, and accounting for how your company addresses its adverse human rights impacts during the pandemic and when emerging from the crisis? Did your company increase and use its leverage over business relationships that could be causing or contributing to harm during the pandemic and when emerging from the crisis?
- 5) What measures did your company introduce to ensure the respect of the human rights of your company’s employees and of all those impacted by your company’s activities in different work situations, including day labourers, non-contract workers, temporary employees, workers in the gig economy and other forms of precarious work situations, those working throughout supply chains, as well as customers and communities?

- 6) Please provide examples of remediation efforts undertaken where your company identified that it caused or contributed to adverse human rights impacts during the pandemic. Which of those remediation efforts proved to be the most successful and how can they serve as examples to follow in the future at times of crisis?
- 7) What opportunities would allow your company to build back better while ensuring action to prevent business-related human rights abuses and protect the human rights of individuals and communities?
- 8) What efforts were made by your company during the relevant human rights impact assessment processes to involve constructive and meaningful consultation with potentially affected groups and to pay special attention to any impacts on individuals that may be at heightened risk of vulnerability or marginalization?
- 9) How is your company planning to adapt to face global challenges, to avoid human rights risks and harms to people and the planet, and to become more resilient and sustainable overall?

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