

Check against delivery

Annual Forum on Business and Human Rights

Opening Session



**Opening remarks by Mr. Puvan Selvanathan, Chairperson of the
Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational
corporations and other business enterprises**

**4 December 2012 at 10.00
Palais des Nations Room XX**

Honourable Chair,

Madame President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished fellow Working Group members,

Distinguished delegates and participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to be representing the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises at the first annual Forum on Business and Human Rights this morning.

I would like to extend a special welcome to Professor John Ruggie, former Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises, to whom we owe the development of the Guiding Principles which lead our mandate, and thank him for undertaking the role of chair of the first annual Forum.

I would also like to extend a warm welcome to the distinguished participants of the opening high-level session and to the representatives of Member States, representatives of the UN system and mechanisms, international and regional organizations, national human rights institutions, trade unions, business associations and enterprises and non-governmental organizations, academics and other experts. The Working Group particularly welcomes the high participation of business representatives from all regions in this first annual Forum. The Working Group recognises that Member States and business representatives both have an essential and leading role to play in the implementation of the Guiding Principles, the authoritative global standard for preventing and addressing adverse impacts on human rights arising from business-related activity. The Guiding Principles are key to providing business with predictability in their operations, and providing clarity as to obligations and responsibilities of all actors, in their different roles, in addressing and remedying those adverse impacts.

When the Human Rights Council historically and unanimously endorsed the Guiding Principles in 2011, it also established our Working Group on business and human rights, and the Forum on Business and Human Rights under the guidance of the Working Group. Let me take this opportunity to clarify in this respect that the Forum on Business and Human Rights is a body established by the Human Rights Council independently of the Working Group, to discuss trends and challenges in the implementation of the Guiding Principles and promote dialogue and cooperation on issues linked to business and human rights, including challenges faced in particular sectors, operational environments or in relation to specific rights or groups, as well as identifying good practices.

In its role as guide to the Forum on Business and Human Rights, the Working Group has sought with the support of OHCHR to gather expectations and ideas from stakeholders for the methodology and format of the first Forum. In this regard, the Working Group expresses its sincere thanks to all those who participated in its online consultation earlier in 2012; and the more than 100 participants who attended the open consultation with stakeholders on 10 May 2012 on the themes and methodology of the Forum on Business and Human Rights.

Based on these consultations, the Working Group's vision is for the Forum to serve as a venue to foster genuine exchange among stakeholders and collective learning – including for the Working Group, with a focus on identifying opportunities for dissemination and implementation in all regions, as well as the experience of different actors in implementing and applying the three Pillars of the Guiding Principles. The Working Group has sought to ensure that discussions at the Forum contribute to the identification of solutions to challenges in this regard, including with regard to effective remedies for affected individuals and communities. In turning this vision into the programme for this Forum, the Working Group has engaged with external facilitators, selected on the basis of their specific expertise and stake in the debate. In this regard, the Working Group wishes to express its gratitude for the efforts and contributions of the facilitators in designing the various sessions.

With regard to participation, we have sought to ensure that there is broad and balanced participation of stakeholders in the Forum, including of States, business, civil society, affected individuals and groups and other key stakeholders in the field of business and human rights. In addition, the Working Group plans to work closely with other key actors in the business and human rights field to maximize synergies and to ensure that the Forum outcomes build on and contribute to the effective implementation of the Guiding Principles and the broader business and human rights agenda at the global, regional and national levels. The Working Group looks forward to being able to offer its reflections on the outcomes of the Forum discussions at the end of the second day; and provide guidance as to the way forward – for all stakeholders, and for the Forum process leading in to 2013 and beyond.

I take this opportunity, as others have done, to express the Working Group's gratitude to the donors and partners acknowledged in the Forum programme; and whose contributions will, it is hoped, enable the Forum to meet the high expectations of stakeholders, in particular in promoting dialogue between all stakeholders towards the implementation of the Guiding Principles.

Before I hand the floor to Professor John Ruggie, the Working Group would like to acknowledge his historic and ground breaking role in moving the business and human rights agenda forward. Approaching the subject through "Principled Pragmatism", underpinned by rigorous research and evidence, and informed by extensive and inclusive consultation, Professor Ruggie managed to overcome decades of dogma and division and develop a framework that is both faithful to long-standing fundamental human rights norms and principles while also being innovative and responsive to the practical challenges and concerns of the stakeholders involved. The breath of initiatives and activities that will be displayed

during this Forum as well as the depth and scope of the thematic discussions which have been planned are evidence of the impact of his work.

The Working Group is looking forward to following the deliberations over the next two days, and we wish you a successful meeting and discussions.

I would now like to hand the floor over to Professor John Ruggie.

Thank you very much for your attention.