



INAUGURAL HUMAN RIGHTS WORKING GROUP FOR BUSINESS LAUNCHED IN AUSTRALIA

10 December 2010, Sydney, Australia – The Global Compact Network Australia, a local network of the UN Global Compact [UNGC] together with the support of the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Reverend Tim Costello of World Vision Australia, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the investment community and some of Australia's most prominent corporations, launched Australia's first Human Rights Working Group for Business in Melbourne on Human Rights Day, December 10. The event was kindly hosted by Allens Arthur Robinson, a founding member of the Global Compact Network Australia (GCNA).

The first Working Group participants included representatives from both the big and smaller ends of town, and from a range of industries such as telecommunications, banking, retail and the extractives sectors. Participants included ANZ, BHP Billiton, Intrepid Travel, Origin Energy, Rio Tinto, Sebel Furniture, Telstra and Woolworths.

Rio Tinto Australia's Managing Director David Peever has noted that Rio Tinto is "pleased to be a member of the GCNA Human Rights Working Group for Business. As a founding signatory of the UNGC and a participant in the GCNA's inaugural steering committee Rio Tinto is committed to respecting and supporting human rights consistent with the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and to actively seeking to ensure that we are not complicit in human rights abuses committed by others. In order to meet these commitments, human rights considerations are embedded in our code of conduct *The Way We Work* and in our policy and guidance documents."

President of the Human Rights Commission, Catherine Branson commended all those involved in the launch of the Business and Human Rights Working Group. "Growing numbers of Australian companies are recognising that doing business in a way that demonstrates respect for human rights is not only the correct thing to do, it makes good business sense", she said. "Paying respect to human rights can protect against reputational damage and reduce costs associated with labour disputes, security issues and stakeholder damage control." Ms Branson said that the Australian Human Rights Commission looked forward to working in partnership with GCNA and the working group to advance business understanding of, and respect for, human rights.

The UNGC is the world's largest voluntary corporate citizenship initiative. Launched in 2000, it represents an agreement between business and United Nations agencies, labour, civil society and governments to advance ten universal principles. Based on well known international declarations and conventions these principles represent four key areas of human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption.

In 2009 the Global Compact Network Australia [GCNA] was launched at Parliament House in Canberra by the then Minister for Superannuation and Corporate Law, Senator the Hon Nick Sherry and the UNGC's Executive Director, Georg Kell, supported by Treasury funding. Since the Network's establishment there has been an important 50% increase in Australian signatories to the UNGC.

In commenting on the Human Rights Working Group for Business' inaugural meeting Georg Kell highlighted the importance of local networks such as GCNA and indicated that the UNGC's secretariat looked forward to "following the progress of the GCNA's Human Rights Working Group for Business." He also encouraged the Network to share its experience with other Local Networks across the globe.

The Human Rights Working Group for Business reflects the transitioning role of business in a globalised world - into areas traditionally seen as solely the concern of governments. Of the UNGC's four thematic areas, perhaps the most challenging for business is that of human rights. Signatories are expected to support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights, as well as make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.

But what are the policies and processes that businesses can and should put in place to help them meet these principles? And how do recent international and domestic developments fit into the equation? The Human Rights Working Group for Business aims to facilitate shared learning on human rights challenges and opportunities amongst Australian corporations by providing practical guidance through expert facilitators and concrete tools, as well as a forum for best practice sharing.

The Working Group will provide an opportunity for Australian businesses to learn about and input into relevant international and domestic developments in this area. For instance, the first meeting included an update on the work of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Business and Human Rights Harvard Professor John Ruggie, including his recently released draft *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*.

In congratulating the GCNA on establishing the Human Rights Working Group for Business, Professor Ruggie emphasized the importance of shared learning and noted that "companies working to know and show that they are respecting human rights can benefit significantly from engaging with other companies facing the same dilemmas with the hope that they come together as leaders to raise standards of behaviour."

A multi-stakeholder panel of business, government, civil society and investor representatives kicked off the December 10 event. The Working Group was then facilitated by Vanessa Zimmerman, Legal Advisor to Professor Ruggie and observer to the GCNA board, and Rachel Nicolson, Senior Associate at Allens Arthur Robinson and member of the GCNA board. Business presenters included Greg Welsh, CEO of Sebel Furniture, Armineh Mardirossian, Group Manager, Corporate Responsibility, Community & Sustainability at Woolworths and Jane Gronow, Principal Advisor Community Relations at Rio Tinto. The discussion covered the foundations of human rights and their relevance to business, the business and legal cases for respecting human rights and industry specific issues such as supply chain management.

Rosemary Sainty, Head of the GCNA's Secretariat said of the event: "The wide-ranging representation from across the Australian business community was outstanding. We look forward to 2011 when the Human Rights Working Group for Business will aim to further grow the capacity and momentum amongst Australian business to address human rights issues." The Human Rights Working Group for Business aims to meet four times in 2011 across Australia. A multi-stakeholder event hosted by the GCNA is also planned. The GCNA is housed at St James Ethics Centre, Sydney.

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Full Quotes

Australian Human Rights Commission

President of the Human Rights Commission, Catherine Branson commended all those involved in the launch of the Business and Human Rights Working Group.

"Growing numbers of Australian companies are recognising that doing business in a way that demonstrates respect for human rights is not only the correct thing to do, it makes good business sense", she said. "Paying respect to human rights can protect against reputational damage and reduce costs associated with labour disputes, security issues and stakeholder damage control."

Ms Branson said that the Australian Human Rights Commission looked forward to working in partnership with GCNA and the working group to advance business understanding of, and respect for, human rights.

President of the Human Rights Commission, Catherine Branson, QC – from the Australian Human Rights Commission Public Affairs Unit

United Nations Global Compact Head Quarters, New York

"Local Networks, such as the Global Compact Network Australia (GCNA), are absolutely key for the successful implementation of the UN Global Compact's principles, including its human rights principles, within their respective countries. Corporate sustainability leadership is increasingly driven not only from the top down, but also from the bottom up. Learning, dialogue, collective action and partnerships are important approaches to making progress on business and human rights. Local networks are an excellent forum to advance such approaches. We look forward to following the progress of the GCNA's Human Rights Working Group for Business and encourage the Network to share its experience with other Local Networks across the globe."

Georg Kell, Executive Director, UN Global Compact Office

Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Business and Human Rights

"I congratulate the Global Compact Network Australia on the establishment of its Human Rights Working Group for Business and wish the group the utmost success. Shared learning, whether it entails the exchange of challenges or best practices, is immensely important in this area. Companies working to know and show that they are respecting human rights can benefit significantly from engaging with other companies facing the same dilemmas, with the hope that they come together as leaders to raise standards of behavior."

Professor John Ruggie
Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Business and Human Rights

Rio Tinto

"Rio Tinto as a leading global resources company is pleased to be a member of the GCNA Human Rights Working Group for Business. As a founding signatory of the UNGC, and a participant in the GCNA's inaugural steering committee, Rio Tinto is committed to respecting and supporting human rights consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to actively seeking to ensure that we are not complicit in human rights abuses committed by others. In order to meet these commitments, human rights considerations are embedded in our code of conduct The Way We Work and in our policy and guidance documents."

David Peever, Managing Director, Rio Tinto Australia

Global Compact Network Australia(GCNA)

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Rosemary Sainty, Head, Secretariat, GCNA

Background Information sheet

About the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC)

The [United Nations Global Compact](#) is a call to companies around the world to align their strategies and operations with ten universal principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption, and to take action in support of broader UN goals. The Global Compact is not a regulatory body, but a voluntary leadership platform for dialogue and learning. With more than 8,700 business and non-business signatories in over 130 countries, it is the world's largest corporate responsibility initiative.

About the Australian Network of the United Nations Global Compact (GCNA)

Vision: Australia's strongest corporate citizenship movement committed to the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption.

Mission: To engage the UN Global Compact signatories in Australia through local events and the fostering of a strong, supportive network of like-minded businesses.

Launched in May 2009 with seed funding from the Australian Government (Treasury) through St James Ethics Centre's National Responsible Business Project. Founding Members of the Australian Network include Accenture, Allens Arthur Robinson, Australia Post, KPMG, Nestle Australia, St James Ethics Centre and Westpac.

http://www.hub.ethics.org.au/ungc/global_compact_network_australia

About the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Business and Human Rights

John Ruggie, Berthold Beitz Professor of International Affairs at the Kennedy School of Government and Affiliated Professor in International Legal Studies at Harvard Law School, was appointed by then-Secretary-General Kofi Annan as Special Representative on Business and Human Rights in 2005. In 2008 the UN Human Rights Council welcomed the UN "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework that he proposed and gave him another three-year mandate to develop practical recommendations to operationalize the Framework.

The recently released draft Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights constitute his final guidance in this respect. All stakeholders are invited to provide feedback on the draft Guiding Principles on the Special Representative's online consultation: www.srsgconsultation.org. When this forum closes in late January 2011, the Special Representative will submit the final text of the Guiding Principles to the UN for translation, before presenting it formally to the Human Rights Council at its June session. The Special Representative's mandate ends in June 2011.