



## **HUMAN RIGHTS WORKING GROUP FOR BUSINESS IN AUSTRALIA BUILDS MOMENTUM**

15 April 2011, Sydney, Australia – The Global Compact Network Australia (GCNA), a local network of the UN Global Compact [UNGC] has held the second meeting of its Human Rights Working Group for Business. The event was hosted in Sydney by Westpac, a founding member of the GCNA, with support from the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Attorney General's Department, The Treasury and leading businesses including Pacific Hydro, ANZ, Xstrata and Allens Arthur Robinson. The Working Group was established to provide a forum for shared learning amongst Australian businesses on human rights challenges and opportunities. The second meeting was attended by over 45 participants across sectors such as banking, extractives, energy, telecommunications and major infrastructure.

The Global Compact Network Australia (GCNA) has proved itself to be an effective platform from which to convene multi-stakeholder consultation, collaboration and learning, including in developing the business and human rights agenda, according to Rosemary Sainty who heads the Secretariat of the Network.

Attorney-General Robert McClelland welcomed this excellent initiative:

The protection of human rights is the responsibility of all Australians, including those in the business community. Ongoing discussions about how best to meet human rights obligations in the business sphere are an important part of advancing respect for human rights generally.

The meeting commenced with an update from the Attorney-General's Department on the implications for business of the National Human Rights Action Plan, followed by a discussion on the revision of the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises led by the Australian National Contact Point for the Guidelines based in the Foreign Investment and Trade Policy Division, The Treasury.

The Australian Human Rights Commission outlined their program of work on business and human rights. President of the Australian Human Rights Commission Catherine Branson QC, says working with the business community to promote and protect human rights in Australia is a critical strategy in working towards a fairer Australian society:

In cooperation with the GCNA, the Commission is consulting directly with business representatives to develop appropriate resources that businesses can use to apply human rights standards and principles to their enterprises. The collaboration between GCNA and the Commission demonstrates how Australia's National Human Rights Institution, the United Nations local network and businesses can work together to ensure human rights are both respected and protected in the Australian community.

An advisor to the UN Special Representative on Business and Human Rights also updated participants on the recently released Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The Guiding Principles seek to provide for the first time an authoritative global standard for preventing and addressing the risk of adverse human rights impacts linked to business activity.

In 2008 the UN Human Rights Council welcomed the UN "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework that he proposed for managing business and human rights-related challenges and gave him another three-year mandate to develop practical recommendations to operationalise the Framework.

Following these domestic and international briefings, participants unpacked the human rights due diligence process for preventing and addressing human rights impacts, discussing the business case as well as the realities facing companies operating in Australia and abroad in implementing the process on the ground. Participants heard from presenters with experience in both international and Australian operations about the importance of a whole of business approach to respecting human rights. A senior associate from Allens Arthur Robinson explained the legal compliance benefits of conducting effective human rights due diligence.

Janine Hoey, General Manager Group Operations and Commercial, Pacific Hydro, and one of the session's presenters, elaborated on the opportunities the Working Group offers for shared learning:

At Pacific Hydro, we aspire to best practice in everything we do, and our values are applied equally to our assets and projects in Australia, Chile and Brazil. It's part of our DNA, not just because it's the right thing to do, but because it makes good business sense for us to do it. Working Groups in Australia are a great way for us to share our practical experience and initiatives for the benefit of the broader business community.

The GCNA plans to build the Working Group to develop an Australian business "community of practice" on business and human rights. Matthew Tukaki, Australian Network Representative, Global Compact Network Australia and Chief Executive Officer, The Sustain Group Pty Ltd noted the Working Group's efforts to develop networks between Australian business of all sizes across a diverse range of industries, as well as facilitate productive engagement between different stakeholder groups:

"The recently established human rights working group is an example of business and key stakeholders coming together to find solutions to some big challenges. It is also important to note that when we talk about human rights we not only speak of what is happening internationally, it is also in the domestic context. Whether you are a small or large business, not for profit, Government department or community group, by having a collaborative approach to tackling human rights issues we can achieve a lot more than working in isolation to each other. The working group is a forum where we can identify those challenges, both internationally and domestically, and then seek to find the appropriate solutions."

The Working Group meets quarterly, with plans to hold a multistakeholder event later in 2011.

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## Full Quotes

### **Attorney-General, The Hon Robert McClelland MP**

Attorney-General Robert McClelland welcomed this excellent new initiative.

"The protection of human rights is the responsibility of all Australians, including those in the business community. Ongoing discussions about how best to meet human rights obligations in the business sphere are an important part of advancing respect for human rights generally".

### **President of the Australian Human Rights Commission and Human Rights Commissioner, The Hon. Catherine Branson QC**

President of the Australian Human Rights Commission Catherine Branson QC, says working with the business community to promote and protect human rights in Australia is a critical strategy in working towards a fairer Australian society.

"In cooperation with the GCNA, the Commission is consulting directly with business representatives to develop appropriate resources that businesses can use to apply human rights standards and principles to their enterprises," Ms Branson said.

"The collaboration between GCNA and the Commission demonstrates how Australia's National Human Rights Institution, the United Nations local network and businesses can work together to ensure human rights are both respected and protected in the Australian community."

### **Janine Hoey, Pacific Hydro Pty Ltd General Manager Group Operations and Commercial**

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### **Matthew Tukaki , Australian Network Representative, Global Compact Network Australia and Chief Executive Officer, The Sustain Group Pty Ltd**

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### **Vanessa Zimmerman, Legal Advisor to the UN Special Representative on Business and Human Rights and Observer, GCNA Board**

"The GCNA's Human Rights Working Group is an exciting development designed to provide a productive forum for Australian business to engage on human rights issues. Like similar groups in other UNGC networks around the world, we hope that Australian businesses will learn from each other as well as other stakeholders in deciding how to best address human rights impacts related to their business activities and relationships."

## 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)**

GCNA is 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](http://www.hub.ethics.org.au/ungc/global_compact_network_australia)

Since the Network's establishment there has been an important 50% increase in Australian signatories to the UNGC.

### **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 [Guiding Principles](#) on Business and Human Rights constitute his final guidance in this respect. The Guiding Principles are the product of six years of research and extensive consultations involving governments, companies, business associations, civil society, affected individuals and groups, investors and others around the world. They highlight what steps States should take to foster business respect for human rights; provide a blueprint for companies to know and show that they respect human rights, and reduce the risk of causing or contributing to human rights harm; and constitute a set of benchmarks for stakeholders to assess business respect for human rights. The UN Human Rights Council will consider formal endorsement of the text at its June 2011 session.