

Are Business and Human Rights an Oxymoron?

Dear EEWG Friends,

Do you think business and human rights are an oxymoron? The business participants gathered at Business Roundtable on the Human Rights Principles of UN Global Compact and Business Management Integrated with Human Rights in Seoul, South Korea on Monday, September 14, 2009 said unanimously “No.”

I would like to hear from you, EEWG friends about your thoughts and opinions in your countries and regions regarding this topic. In near future, I sincerely hope similar events could happen with your leadership. I will be very happy to help you with any assistance.

National Human Rights Commission of Korea, Global Compact Korea Network and Korea Human Rights Foundation co-hosted this Business Roundtable with sponsorship from UNDP Korea at Conference Room of National Human Rights Commission of Korea.

15 business participants including CEOs of small and medium size companies and representatives of Korean Chaebol subsidiaries like Samsung, LG and Daewoo attended. The participants came from CSR, Business Ethics, Compliance, Sustainable Management divisions of various industries including electronics, consumer goods, manufacturing, construction, engineering and socially responsible investment etc.

Ursula Wynhoven, the Head, Policy & Legal and Special Assistant to the Executive Director of the United Nations Global Compact Office visited Seoul and explained the human rights principles of UN Global Compact Office and trends of business management integrated with human rights. She elaborated how human rights are relevant for business and why respecting human rights is not only the right thing to do but can make good business case. Also, she helped audience have a closer look at the human rights principles of Global Compact and explained in details what they ask of

companies. She emphasized roles of business to respect human rights such as ensuring due diligence through a Human Rights Management Framework in the areas of business strategy, policy, process and procedures, communication, training, evaluation and measurement and reporting, supporting human rights in sphere of corporate influence in workplace, supply chain, marketplace, community and government and avoiding complicity in human rights abuses.

I was privileged to present implications of human rights in business management of non-Korean corporations and prospect of human rights friendly practices of Korean corporations. We know that many advanced non-Korean corporations have started business management integrated with human rights from a small but basic step. They try to find human rights related components from their existing business activities and to expand their recognition and activities in business and human rights arena. I introduced a dozen characteristics of the advanced trends in business and human rights – awakening, systemization, leadership & organizational change, integration, connection with ethical consumerism, consideration for diversity, value creating supply chain management, innovative partnership with NGOs, sectoral collective action, multilateral alliance, prevention and respect for rights of indigenous people and community. Korean corporations tend to think business management integrated with human rights very difficult, not realizing many of their existing activities are already related with human rights such as in their ethical business management practices for years.

HP Korea's case focusing "Diversity" values to promote human rights was presented with HP's corporate philosophy and ethical management practices, known as HP WAY. Univera explained its efforts to realize its mission, "Happy Workplace Pursuing Dreams Together" and its business model to make a virtuous cycle among individual, people, company and society.

Business participants had a chance to express their views on business and human rights candidly. We also learned a lot from them and were able to know their interests for further learning and engagement. They realized that the human rights principles of UN

Global Compact are not restricting business activities, but enabling business to utilize strategic frameworks in business management, which are universally acceptable and adaptable to all stakeholders in spheres of corporate influence.

It was a very meaningful event to see differences and similarities in business management integrated with human rights between in developed economies and in South Korea. As we know, the 6th principle of new Corporation 20/20 principles for corporate design is “Corporations shall not infringe on the right of natural persons to govern themselves, nor infringe on other universal human rights.” Realizing human rights in business might be difficult, but once we know small steps are possible and enable us to move forward, it will motivate us to further stages for new corporate design to fulfill our vision and future paths.

I love to hear your comments and opinions as well as aspirations to try similar efforts in your countries and regions. I sincerely hope we can make progress little by little together.

Sincerely,

Angela

[Business Roundtable on the Human Rights Principles of UN Global Compact and Business Management Integrated with Human Rights]

- * Date: Monday, September 14, 2009 (2 pm ~ 5:30 pm)
- * Venue: Conference Room of National Human Rights Commission of Korea
- * Co-hosts: National Human Rights Commission of Korea, Global Compact Korea Network and Korea Human Rights Foundation
- * Sponsor: UNDP Korea
- * Program:

1:30 ~ 2:00 Registration

2:00 ~ 2:20 (20 min.) Welcome speech

- Ju, Chul-Ki, VP and Secretary General of Global Compact Korea Network

2:20 ~ 2:50 (30 min.)

Session 1: “The Human Rights Principles of UN Global Compact and Trends of Business Management Integrated with Human Rights”

- Ursula Wynhoven, Head, Policy & Legal of Global Compact Office

2:50 ~ 3:10 (20 min.)

Session 2: “Implications of Human Rights in Business Management of non-Korean corporations and Prospect of Human Rights Friendly Practices of Korean Corporations”

- Angela Joo-Hyun Kang, Founder and CEO of G-CEF (Global Competitiveness Empowerment Forum) & Advisor of Business and Human Rights of Korea Human Rights Foundation

3:10 ~ 3:40 (30 min.) Coffee break

3:40 ~ 4:20 (40 min.)

Session 3: “Future of Korean Business Management Integrated with Human Rights; Case Introductions of Korean Corporations”

- A Korean subsidiary of an American multinational corporation in electronics sector: Kim, Jung-Hyun, HR Manager, HR Global Operation, HP Korea (20 min.)

- A Korean aloe production & marketing company: Cho, Bok-Hee, Managing Director, Marketing Division, Univera (20 min.)

4:20 ~ 5:30 (70 min.)

<Interactive dialogue>

Moderator: Jeong, Sun-Ae, Managing Director, Korea Human Rights Foundation

- Q & A

- Discussion of all presenters and business participants

5:30 Adjourn

[UN Global Compact Principles]

1) Human Rights

Principle 1: Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and

Principle 2: make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.

2) Labour

Principle 3: Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;

Principle 4: the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour ;

Principle 5: the effective abolition of child labour ; and

Principle 6: the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

3) Environment

Principle 7: Businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges;

Principle 8: undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility; and

Principle 9: encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.

4) Anti-Corruption

Principle 10: Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.