

**Statement by European Group of National Human Rights Institutions,  
Canadian Human Rights Commission, Philippines Commission on Human  
Rights and Human Rights Commission of Korea**

United Nations Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational  
corporations and other business enterprises

Panel discussion on managing human rights risks in the garment sector global  
supply chain

Thursday 20 June 2013

Members of the Working Group,  
Distinguished participants,

The International Coordinating Committee (ICC) of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights is the worldwide association of NHRIs who meet the UN Paris Principles requirements including independence, impartiality and pluralism. This statement is made on behalf of ICC members comprising the European Group of National Human Rights Institutions, Canadian Human Rights Commission, Philippines Commission on Human Rights and Human Rights Commission of Korea.

Resolution 17/4 of the UN Human Rights Council which endorses the UN Guiding Principles underlines the role and mandate of NHRIs under each of the three pillars of the protect, respect, remedy framework.

In their 2010 Edinburgh Declaration,<sup>1</sup> and subsequent action plans concluded by each of the ICC's four regional networks,<sup>2</sup> NHRIs have affirmed their collective commitment to step up their actions to address business-related human rights abuses, and to build their capacity towards this goal.

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<sup>1</sup>[http://scottishhumanrights.com/application/resources/documents/ENG\\_Sep\\_2010\\_Edinburgh\\_Declaration\\_FINAL\\_101010\\_1417h.doc](http://scottishhumanrights.com/application/resources/documents/ENG_Sep_2010_Edinburgh_Declaration_FINAL_101010_1417h.doc)

<sup>2</sup> Available at: <http://nhri.ohchr.org/EN/Themes/BusinessHR/Pages/Capacity%20Building.aspx>

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The NHRIs joined to this statement welcome this opportunity provided by the UN Working Group to contribute to discussion regarding human rights risks in the garment sector global supply chain, prompted by the horrifying events that took place in April at Rana Plaza.

That disaster grimly illustrates the price that low-paid and vulnerable workers, particularly women, around the world are paying, every day, as a result of the failure of duty-bearers, both public and private, to meet their responsibilities as set out under the UN Framework, to provide a safe and healthy working environment in which freedom of association and collective bargaining, and other core labour rights, are respected. The NHRIs joined to this statement abhor the continuing violation of human rights from work-related fatalities and illnesses, estimated by the ILO to result in approximately 2.3 million deaths and countless injuries each year.

Many NHRIs are already using their individual mandates to address such abuses:

- through handling labour-related complaints they receive from workers
- by using formal powers of investigation to respond to specific incidents or situations
- by providing training and education on labour rights
- by monitoring national implementation of health and safety and other labour rights, and urging governments to take appropriate remedial action, and to adopt national action plans on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

In some cases, NHRIs in home states of multinational enterprises are working towards securing accountability for human rights abuses abroad, by collaborating with NHRIs of host-states or those of states of nationality of migrant workers. For instance, the Korean and Philippines Human Rights Commissions have engaged together to address poor workplace safety standards in one Korean shipyard that led to fatalities and injuries of Philippine workers.

The ICC welcomes responses by stakeholders to address this need for transnational accountability on business and human rights issues in the Bangladesh context, such

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as the ILO-facilitated action plan and the *Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh* concluded by multinational fashion companies and their suppliers.

However, underlying problems in the textile and garment sector in Bangladesh that are now known to have contributed to Rana Plaza were well known, and for its victims, this response comes, tragically, as too little, too late.

Accordingly, we urge the UN Working Group to use its mandate to highlight to states and business enterprises, in unequivocal terms, the most urgent need for effective, general implementation of the UN framework through appropriate measures, and to identify and communicate clear and prioritised recommendations to duty-bearers to support the achievement of this aim.

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