

Co-organizers' Event Summary
Responsible Business, Human Rights and Decent Work in Asia
Harnessing Synergies between Human Rights and Inclusive Growth
18 September 2023, Jakarta Indonesia

The growing attention to ensuring respect for human rights and international labour standards in supply chains has prompted an increasing number of countries to undertake proactive initiatives to foster responsible business conduct, promote decent work and protect rights-holders. Diverse national approaches, shaped by national contexts and needs, also underscore that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to addressing the complex issues of business and human rights. Furthermore, given this complexity, the need for broader discussions about business and human rights is evident across countries. This corresponds with the recognized need for such discussions within and beyond the G7, as highlighted in the recent G7 Trade Minister's Statement and Hiroshima Leaders' Communiqué.

Aligned with this perspective, a dialogue event was co-organized by Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) to facilitate in-depth discussions on business and human rights across Asian countries on 18th September 2023. The event convened governments, businesses, workers' organizations and experts, mainly from Asian countries and G7 members. Anchored by the keynote speeches, it highlighted the importance of harnessing synergies between respect for human rights and inclusive growth while addressing key challenges and lessons learned for achieving further progress and desired outcomes on business and human rights. It emphasized that these synergies help create an enabling environment for businesses to uphold human and labour rights in their operations and in their supply chains. The event also acknowledged that Asian countries have pursued the protection and promotion of human rights in business operations while achieving economic progress, albeit at varying levels across nations.

Building upon this, the discussion showcased regional and national initiatives from Asian countries and G7 members aimed at implementing relevant international standards on business and human rights, which outlined the State duty to protect human rights and the responsibility of business to respect human rights, while recognizing the need for access to effective remedy. It acknowledged the importance of the diverse range of initiatives and approaches aimed at promoting responsible business conduct and decent work in supply chains to implement relevant international standards on business and human rights, illustrating the ownership of each country, and taking into account specific contexts. The event also explored opportunities and challenges associated with making better use of the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration) in Asian countries in order to advance decent work in supply chains.

These interactions helped build an enhanced understanding of the need to promote responsible business conduct in the region.

The event also highlighted the importance of skills development in helping countries harness socioeconomic transformation as a driving force for a sustainable and inclusive future. It emphasized the critical role skills development can play in bolstering responsible business practices, promoting decent work and fostering inclusive growth in Asia. Despite significant skills challenges in the region, governments, employers' and workers' organizations have already responded with various and innovative initiatives. Additionally, the role of reskilling, upskilling and lifelong learning was stressed as a means to facilitate a just transition for workers amid socioeconomic transformations, enabling them to broaden their employment prospects. The discussion further explored avenues for integrating business and human rights principles into skills development programmes, with a focus on practical solutions that raise awareness and promote responsible business conduct.

In addition to discussing the role of governments in fostering an enabling environment for both inclusive growth and respect for human rights in business operations, including through good governance, and in increasing predictability for businesses, the event highlighted the responsibility of business to respect human rights, and its role in promoting decent work and advancing economic progress. While many businesses acknowledge this responsibility, translating this into action across the private sector, including in SMEs, is not always easy. The event provided insights into leading corporate initiatives that have committed to responsible business conduct, respecting the principles of international standards on business and human rights, and embracing collaborative approaches among various supply chain actors. These encompassed a range of corporate practices, which could serve as reference points for peer learning, for example, in relation to locally driven business development, alignment of corporate policies and practices with relevant international standards, and the promotion of social dialogue between employers and workers. The discussions also acknowledged that additional support for SMEs will foster progressive improvements in supply chain due diligence processes.

Overall, the dialogue event facilitated robust discussions on the topic of business and human rights and decent work among governments, employers' and workers' organizations, enterprises and other supply chain actors, promoting shared values based on relevant international standards, including international labour standards. It recognized the importance of the engagement of all stakeholders, including in peer learning, awareness-raising and collaboration. Such multistakeholder approaches enhance the protection of human and labour rights in business operations. Moreover, the event highlighted the importance of international collaboration and the critical role of social dialogue in promoting good social practices and advancing economic progress.