

Invitation to roundtable meeting

Managing risks in challenging markets

The Role of Business in Protecting Civic Freedoms & Human Rights Defenders

Corporate Activism or Basic Human Rights Due Diligence?

DanChurchAid (DCA), The Confederation of Danish Industry (DI), Global Compact Network Denmark, and the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre (BHRRRC) are pleased to invite you to join this roundtable.

28 May 2018, 9:00 – 11:00

Confederation of Danish Industry, H. C. Andersens Blvd. 18, Copenhagen V

For companies only. Chatham House rules apply.

The objective of the roundtable is to enable a constructive dialogue on why it can be relevant for Danish business to consider engagement in civic freedom and safe space for human rights defenders.

The set-up is based on the success of BHRRRCs **Business Network on Civic Freedoms and Human Rights Defenders**. Here 30 multi-national companies are already engaged and share their experiences and progress.

Through case presentations, the roundtable will open the floor for discussions based on

experiences from Danish and international companies and show-case BHRRRC's Business, Civic Freedoms & Human Rights Defenders Portal.

The roundtable meeting seeks to provide the space for Danish businesses to come together with leading subject matter experts in a safe and trusted space, in order to discuss the role, opportunities and challenges for businesses in supporting civic freedoms and human rights defenders in emerging markets.

Agenda

- 09:00 – 09:10 Welcome, by *Christine Jøker Lohmann, DI & Gitte Dyrhagen Husager, DCA*
- 09:10 – 09:20 Round of introduction
- 09:20 – 09:30 Setting the Scene, by *Mauricio Lazala, BHRRC*
- 09:30 – 09:40 Video Presentation
- 09:40 – 10:00 Policies, Practices and Guidelines, by *Mauricio Lazala, BHRRC*
- 10:00 – 10:20 Discussion, *facilitated by Christine Jøker Lohmann*
- 10:20 – 10:40 Group work
- 10:40 – 11:00 Reflections and Round up of event,
by Christine Jøker Lohmann, DI & Gitte Dyrhagen Husager

Background

Since the 2011 endorsement of the UN Guiding Principles on business and human rights (UNGPs) there has been a rise in attacks against human rights defenders, and in businesses stepping up to human rights challenges related to their operational spheres. The increasing awareness, among business leaders and investors on "the business case" for respecting human rights, has been additionally underlined by the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The risk of inaction – and not speaking up for fundamental freedoms and access to justice - can be seen by businesses as a risk, and thus compromising their own abilities to operate, move people and capital across borders and function. Businesses depend on open societies and strong institutions, building on respect for human rights and the rule of law. This enables the creativity, innovation and critical thinking needed to secure investments as recognized by the Sustainable Development Goals, especially goal 16 and 17.

This year, we should all be celebrating the 70th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights, as well as the 20th anniversary of the UN Resolution on Human Rights Defenders. However, we are experiencing a world where civic freedoms are increasingly being restricted through the passing of restrictive national legislations, rising populism and hateful rhetoric. The closing of the "civic space" also results in raising numbers of threats and violence towards civil society organisations and human rights defenders across all corners of the world. This threatens the fundamental fabric of peaceful societies where sustainable business can grow free of risks.

Many companies have until now primarily seen civil society and human rights defenders as adversaries, because of their role in challenging corporate actions or policies. Voices spanning from academia and the World Economic Forum, to the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and the Head of Social and Environmental Affairs at Adidas are now contesting this notion. The counterargument is that a free and vibrant civic environment is not only needed for businesses to survive, but also essential for companies to get a "social licence to operate" and ultimately thrive in the long term. By doing so, businesses will also take further steps to change the perception of companies as human rights offenders, and enhance opportunities for broader stakeholder collaborations to address and prevent human rights violations.