

CEGESTI runs parallel session in 2014 United Nations Forum on Business and Human Rights to share the experience of Central American companies in implementing the UN Guiding Principles

As part of the 2014 UN Forum on Business and Human Rights, which has taken place in Geneva on 1-3 December 2014, CEGESTI has run the parallel session called “Commitment of the Central American private sector to respect human rights” whose objective has been to share the commitment of the Central American private sector organizations to respect human rights through policies and the integration of human rights into business practices by their member companies (more than 3,000), as well as, to facilitate a space of dialogue on barriers and facilitators to achieve massive compliance of human rights.

CEGESTI is a non for profit organization that promotes since 1990 sustainable development in Central America and the Caribbean. CEGESTI was created as a result of a UNDP and UNIDO project. From 2011 to 2014, CEGESTI executed the project “Strengthening Human Rights and Decent Work in Central



America” thanks to the support of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (see a summary of the main results of the project transmitted in the event in the box below). The general objective of the project was to promote the improvement of the regional capacities to ensure respect for human rights and decent work, particularly in the business sector. CEGESTI developed tools to work with companies based on the UN Principles (www.negociosresponsables.org)

In usual order: Javier Prats (AHPER), Carla Caballeros (CACIF), Daira Gómez (CEGESTI) and Roger Forbes (CEGESTI). In the back: Pèrsida Jiménez (PAC) and Mariana Luna (AHPER).

Source: CEGESTI.

CEGESTI interest in integrating human rights into business practices, according to the guiding principles, has enabled the organization to support the Umbrella Organizations from Private Sector in Guatemala, Nicaragua and Honduras, which represents more than 3000 companies. Several activities were conducted to promote the guiding principles and support the development of policies to respect the human rights. Main results of this project and business case examples have been shared during the event in the United Nations in Geneva.

The parallel session has been organized in two segments. Firstly each speaker has shared their experiences and thoughts in regards the integration of human rights to business from the on the ground perspective, and secondly there were space for comments and questions from the audience.

The panel has been integrated by Ms Daira Gómez, Executive Director of CEGESTI, who shared about the barriers and facilitators to achieve compliance of human rights by the private sector based on the project: Strengthening Human Rights and Decent Jobs in Central America executed by CEGESTI with the financial support of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ms Carla Caballeros, Executive Director of the Chamber of Agriculture of Guatemala and delegated representative of the Comité Coordinador de Asociaciones



In usual order: Javier Prats (AHPER), Carla Caballeros (CACIF) and Daira Gómez (CEGESTI). Source: CEGESTI

Agrícolas, Comerciales, Industriales y Financieras (CACIF), the Guatemalan umbrella organization of the private sector, who commented on the commitment of this organization to respect human rights and monitoring its compliance. Finally, Mr. Javier Prats, delegated representative of the Asociación Hondureña de Energía Renovable (AHPER), who spoke about the commitment of the renewable energy sector in Honduras, providing practical

examples and commenting on next steps for the private sector. The panel had Mr Roger Forbes, Responsible Business Coordinator of CEGESTI as the chairperson.

The side event has great relevance since it is an excellent example of scaling up at international level the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles based on the Central American experience.

Due to the implementation of the Strengthening Human Rights and Decent Jobs in Central America project, it has been achieved the strengthening of the dignity of thousands of workers and their families in the region. As Ms. Gomez has explained, the project has had the capacity to impact the Central American societies in three different levels: people and business in the private sector level, public institutions and multi-stakeholders dialogue at national and regional levels through the promotion of dialogue and public policy advocacy, and the general society through the creation and availability of knowledge resources, through the free dissemination of practical guides to respect human rights, labor practices and protection of the environment reaching hundreds of companies and peoples.

It is significant, in the case of Guatemala the adoption by the whole corporate private sector of a policy to increase the massive human rights compliance and to definition of the indicators to monitor its compliance. The private sector has taken a public commitment towards the President of the Country and the Human Rights Ombudsmen

In the case of the Chambers of Renewable Energy Companies from Honduras and PAC from Nicaragua, the adoption not only of the policies but also the introduction of practices at their company members to guarantee compliance with Human Rights has also been very significant. Together, the Nicaraguan and Honduran chambers represent 120 companies.

The practical cases and benefits for the persons working at the companies in terms of their rights have been executively presented in the event. Main aspects shared in the session are summarized as follows:

- **Guatemala: Policy to respect human rights signed by the Umbrella Organization of the Private Sector of Guatemala (CACIF)**

On April, 29th 2014, the Coordinating Committee of Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial and Financial Associations of Guatemala (CACIF) have publicly and voluntarily released its institutional policy to respect human rights. Through this policy, CACIF reiterates its commitment to the law and human dignity in alignment with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Constitution of the Republic of Guatemala. The event was honored with the presence of the President of the Republic of Guatemala, Mr. Otto Pérez Molina, and the Human Rights Ombudsman, Mr. Jorge León.



*Carla Caballeros, representative of CACIF.
Source: CEGESTI.*

The signature of this policy is of a great significance in terms of its impact on the dignity of thousands of Guatemalan people that work directly and indirectly for the private sector, but also, because it represents the commitment of the formal private sector highlighting the importance of enabling conditions to formalize employment in Guatemala. Currently, CEGESTI is supporting CACIF in monitoring indicators to demonstrate policy compliance. The policy is available at:

http://www.cacif.org.gt/images/pdf/politica_lab_ddhh.pdf

- **Honduras: Policy to Respect to Human Rights in 80 renewable energy producers**

AHPER is the group that represents the renewable energy producers and related businesses in Honduras. It was created with the purpose of promoting the country's economic development through searching social, economic and environmentally effective solutions to the different problems experienced by the energy sector. It groups a total of 80 member enterprises, of which 77 work directly in the fields of hydroelectric, wind, solar, geothermal and biomass energies.

On October, 24th 2013, a “Policy to Respect to Human Rights” was approved by the Board of Directors of AHPER. Through this commitment, AHPER communicate and motivate compliance and respect for human rights among its members. During the session, also main improvements in human rights, occupational health and safety, and



good practices in two hydroelectric affiliate organizations have been presented: La Esperanza and Empresa Hidroelectrica Cuyamel (COCUY). Mr Javier Prats and Mariana Luna, from AHPER, have provided further details of the case during the event and as part of CEGESTI’ stand.

The event has called the attention of many interested parties.

Source: CEGESTI.

- **Nicaragua: Commitment established in a Human Rights Policy by Asociación Pueblos en Acción Comunitaria**

The “Asociación Pueblos en Acción Comunitaria (PAC)” (People in Community Action – PAC) is a Christian inspired non-profit non-governmental organization legally constituted on July 02, 1996 and based in Nicaragua. Currently, this organization has 100 collaborators, including technical team and personnel. Its associates are 1268 small rural producers throughout the country, strategically grouped in self-managed groups for economic development (GADE, as abbreviated in Spanish).

On February, 21st, 2014, the General Assembly of PAC, at a meeting of its members, agreed and welcomed the signing of the "Policy of Respect for Human Rights". Through this policy, PAC confirms its commitment to comply with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and to promote the respect of human rights among their affiliates and members. The case of PAC has been briefly referred by Ms. Gomez during the session. The Business Development Manager of PAC, Ms. Pérsida Jiménez, has participated as part of the CEGESTI’s stand giving further details about PAC experience.

The event has been particularly useful for: business companies and producers; chambers of private sectors members of international organizations, the academic sector, human rights NGOs, human rights defenders and other representatives interested in listen to the voice of private sector from its practical experience in implementing the UN Guiding Principles, who actively participated in the question and comments part of the event.



CEGESTI's stand: Gabriela Román (CEGESTI), Mariana Luna (AHPER), Javier Prats (AHPER) and Roger Forbes (CEGESTI) as well as other members of the Central American delegation have shared with many participants' material and experiences of the project. Source: CEGESTI

Main results of the project: Strengthening Human Rights and Decent Work in Central America

- 1. People and business.** Direct impact: 972 workers, 900 producers, 45 small and medium companies. Indirect benefit: 1268 producers, 330 companies.
- 2. National Level.** Public commitment to respect human rights by private sector organizations representing more than 3,000 companies. In Guatemala, The Committee of Agriculture, Commercial, Industrial and Financial Associations Business (CACIF), in Nicaragua of Pueblos en Acción Comunitaria (PAC) and The Honduran Association of Renewable Energy Producers (AHPER). Several activities were conducted to promote the guiding principles and support the development of policies to respect the human rights.
- 3. Public Institutions.** Respect of Human Rights by Public Institutions through Sustainable Public Procurement. Direct impact. 12 Ministries and Public Institutions and 400 people trained.
- 4. Multi-stakeholder Dialogue.** Four regional spaces of dialogue with representatives from several stakeholders were achieved. Main issues discussed: the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights; green economy and decent work; measures to improve compliance with decent work and integration of human rights in the waste management sector.
- 5. Regional Level. Public Policies /advocacy.** Three public policies were generated with active participation of private sector, ministries and other stakeholders. Policies are: "Integration of the social dimension in business practices"; "Green employment in the sector of waste recollection" and "Promotion of decent work through Sustainable Public Procurement.
- 6. Knowledge Resources.** The project developed and disseminated practical guides to respect human rights, labor practices and protection of the environment reaching hundreds of companies.

One stand during the whole 2014 UN Forum on Business and Human Rights has also sheared with the general public assisting to the event the many different results of the project in its different levels of impact.

For more information about CEGESTI visit www.cegesti.org; www.negociosresponsables.org.