

New Survey Shows Need For Global Framework On Business And Human Rights

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A new survey commissioned by the Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB) shows growing awareness in corporations about their role and responsibilities in the area of human rights, but clearly flags the need for a more robust framework to approach and act on the issue.

“There is growing momentum around the business and human rights agenda,” said John Morrison, Executive Director of IHRB. “But the results of this survey also highlight the fact that business, civil society and government require far more clarity around expectations, concepts and approaches for addressing human rights-relevant issues.”

The global online survey, carried out over the past month, was completed by a diverse range of thought leaders and practitioners, including chairmen, CEOs, heads of communications and CSR specialists from more than a dozen sectors including manufacturing, energy, mining, retail and professional services as well as academia, civil society and government.

Ninety percent of those polled “mostly from companies with global operations and an advanced understanding of the issue” were familiar with the idea that business should monitor the human rights impacts of their operations.

As many as 97 percent of the leaders surveyed believe business must respect the human rights of those they touch, while only a third said their organisations measure their impact on human rights. However, two thirds said they do plan to start reporting on their human rights impacts within the next five years.

Reputation protection was seen as the prime reason for businesses to ensure their human rights compliance, with business risk mitigation rated a close second.

The leadership team was viewed by 87 percent of respondents as being the appropriate responsible unit for human rights performance within the company, and insufficient awareness among key managers was given as the reason for the failure of companies to create and implement human rights policies.

While most respondents were aware of the United Nations Global Compact, only a quarter had heard of the new United Nations-endorsed “Protect, Respect, Remedy” framework on business and human rights which is due to be approved the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva this week. “

It will be the first globally agreed standard to clarify the complementary roles of government and business in ensuring human rights protection and to provide practical guidance for companies on implementing their responsibility to respect all human rights.

Sandra Macleod, CEO of Echo Research, the global reputation analysis and stakeholder research company which conducted the survey, said the responses demonstrated that the UN “Protect, Respect, Remedy” framework was very timely.

“The results show that companies are aware of the importance of this issue and trying to approach it in many different ways, which indicates a need to move to a more common approach that makes it more accessible and applicable for all,” Macleod said. “The new UN framework is both timely and clearly necessary.” For more information on the results of the survey please visit the Echo website at: <http://www.echoresearch.com/en/articles-events/latest/item/155-id.100663927.html>

IHRB appointed Echo Research to conduct its first global survey in May 2011. Echo launched an online survey and invited key business leaders from its and the IHRB’s database to participate. Access to the survey was also possible from both organisations’ websites directly. “

The survey was live from 5 to 31 May 2011, and was completed by 97 individuals, including directors of global communications and CEOs. Respondents represented a broad range of sectors; 60% of all respondents have global remits.

About The Institute for Human Rights and Business
<http://www.ihrb.org/>

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