

Guatemala holds its own Business and Human Rights Forum

The aim of the activity was to discuss the role of the Guatemalan government as catalyst for business' respect for human rights.

The forum was a joint initiative by the European Union, Advocacy for Business and Human Rights (ABHR), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the British Embassy. Participants included; Anabella Sibrián, International Platform against Impunity; Lucrecia Hernández Mack, elect Congresswoman; Claudia Lavinia Figueroa, Secretary General at the Ombudsman Office; and Connie de Paiz, President of the Guatemalan Association of Exporters.

The panel discussion was held between civil society, public and private sector; and was an opportunity to promote a safe space to have a constructive dialogue and compare the challenges that all sectors face when implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The discussion flowed from sharing concerns, risks and possible solutions, to moving from a passive state to a preventive and active state.

Discussions also focused on the importance between corporations and indigenous communities' relations, the role of each sector in preventing conflict, conflict resolution, and suggestions for the incumbent government on how the country can move forward.

The organizers expressed their commitment to the promotion of the UN Guiding Principles on Business & Human Rights; and dialogue, to protect and guarantee human rights recognized in the international law. This endorsement included the support of businesses and the different key actors involved in fostering prosperity in Guatemala.

Barbara Amono-Oceng, Deputy Head of Mission for the British Embassy to Guatemala, said:

We believe the UK's approach strikes an appropriate balance between encouraging strong corporate behaviour on human rights and avoiding an over-regulated approach, our aim is to encourage a race to the top and this is what we want to foster in Guatemala.

Stefano Gatto, European Union Ambassador to Guatemala, said:

There is no contradiction between well-understood human rights and the indispensable role of companies in promoting the economic development of a country. Dialogue is the fundamental tool that must prevail, with the aim of overcoming any obstacle with a view to the common good.