

UN experts report: Business 'dragging its feet' on human rights worldwide

Too many businesses are putting profit above human rights and “ignoring” their obligations, while governments fail to “regulate and lead by example”, according to a United Nations human rights report, published on Tuesday.

In the report drawn up by a group of UN rights experts, companies are being urged to comply with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights , which provides a framework for how States and investors, should address shortcomings in board rooms and business practice at all levels.

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The Chair of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, Dante Pesce, said that that “human rights due-diligence” was fundamentally “about preventing negative impacts on people.” He explained that identifying and being transparent about risks, was the first step toward prevention of abuses.

“Ensuring that human rights are respected across their own activities and value chains, is the most significant contribution most companies can make towards sustainable development,” he added.

More investors are beginning to take note of human rights risks and pressuring companies to step up their efforts to prevent abuses, according to the report, but further progress needs to be made.

With a few companies leading the way, most are still either unaware of their duty to human rights standards, or unwilling to implement due diligence, said the experts. Greater government action is also required.

“In spite of an overall picture of slow progress, the good news is that human rights due-diligence can be done,” Mr. Pesce said, pressing that businesses can no longer blame a lack of knowledge for inaction.

“Evidence is clearly suggesting that doing the right thing is also the smart thing to do,” he added.