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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Information presented by the Equality and Human Rights Commission of the Great Britain*

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat of the Human Rights Council hereby transmits the communication submitted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission of the Great Britain,** reproduced below in accordance with rule 7(b) of the rules of procedures described in the annex to Council resolution 5/1, according to which participation of national human rights institutions is to be based on arrangements and practices agreed upon by the Commission on Human Rights, including resolution 2005/74 of 20 April 2005.

* National human rights institution with “A”-status accreditation from the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.

** Reproduced in the annex as received, in the language of submission only.

Annex

[English only]

In this statement the Equality and Human Rights Commission (hereafter the Commission) wishes to welcome the report of the Working Group as well as international, regional and national developments on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises. The Commission also wishes to provide information on the work it is carrying out in this field in line with the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions Working Group on Business and Human Rights Action Plan.

The Commission supports, in line with the statement of the ICC Working Group on Business and Human Rights, the strategy outlined in the report. Specifically, the Commission supports:

- using the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework (hereafter Guiding Principles) as a common reference point in a rapidly developing field;
- using the Guiding Principles to promote accountability;
- building an environment that is receptive of the Guiding Principles.

We welcome the report’s acknowledgment of the role and contributions of National Human Rights Institutions in promoting and implementing the Guiding Principles as well as providing protection and remedy for victims of violations. We concur with the ICC Working Group Statement that NHRIs are ideally placed to provide support to the implementation of the business and human rights agenda at national, regional and international level, in cooperation with business, governments, regional organisations, the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions and the United Nations.

At the regional level we welcome the European Union plans to develop sector specific guidance on the corporate responsibility to protect human rights in employment and recruitment, ICT and telecommunications as well as oil and gas.

On the national level we welcome the commitment of the United Kingdom Government to implementing the Guiding Principles as well as promoting international compliance with the Principles. We welcome the Government’s strategy on business and human rights and its commitment to involving and consulting NHRIs and civil society in developing and implementing further plans. We also welcome the publication of a toolkit designed to help UK overseas missions promote good conduct by UK companies operating overseas and the Overseas Business Risk (OBR) service, which in conjunction with UK Trade and Investment the alerts companies to the possible risks of operating in certain overseas markets and which included human rights issues.

To implement the action plan of the ICC Working Group on Business and Human Rights, the Commission has engaged in a series of activities to:

(a) Provide guidance and tools to national institutions on business and human rights

The Commission is developing practical guidance for smaller and medium-sized business operating in Britain and elsewhere. It is doing this in partnership with businesses and with the business and human rights community. The guidance will make the business case for human rights in business, outline the UN guiding principles and the importance of human rights due diligence, and explain human rights impacts in seven key areas: customers, communities, discrimination, labour rights, human trafficking, privacy and transparency.

This guidance is underpinned by research commissioned from the University of Middlesex to map and evaluate existing guidance on business and human rights.

(b) Engage with stakeholders on human rights and the role of national institutions in implementing international and regional initiatives on business and human rights

In October 2010, the Commission set up a Working Group on Business and Human Rights with the aim of facilitating dialogue and encouraging businesses to integrate human rights into their business practices. It is primarily made up of UK businesses and also includes representatives from trade bodies, unions, government and civil society.

The main focus of the group is business activities and human rights within the UK's borders; however, it recognises that the policy framework established by the Government and UK corporate headquarters strongly influences UK business' actions overseas.

(c) Produce and deliver awareness and outreach activities and products

Last year, the Commission supported 'Countdown to 2011'; a series of events bringing together businesses and other key stakeholders in the business and human rights field to debate the John Ruggie framework. The events, in association with a leading law firm Clifford Chance, the International Business Leaders Forum and Amnesty International UK, considered the practical challenges of adopting the 'Protect, Respect and Remedy' framework. Following the events we produced a short film in which business leaders share their views on key questions. The film can be viewed on our website. <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/here-for-business/human-rights-matter-to-business/>

(d) To develop, pilot, implement and evaluate regional training and tools in collaboration with regional networks

An important aspect of the planned publication of guidance for SMEs, later this year, will be to evaluate its reach and impact across the SME sector.

We will be exploring synergies with the European Commission on guidance for SMEs. We will continue to cooperate with Commissions in Scotland and Northern Ireland and ICC partners.

We encourage the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises to continue to engage with the International Coordinating Committee, consulting on the implementation of the strategy, clarifying expectations of National Human Rights Institution and providing expert guidance on effective tools to promote dissemination and implementation of the Guiding Principles.