

Strengthening Sustainability Culture Through Human Rights Policy

In the Philippines, the term human rights conjure up an image of intense political discussions especially in the social media. Yet, the respect for human rights is a universal principle and is one of the cornerstones of Sustainability culture. Human Rights go beyond politics and strike deep into the core of our humanity. Hence, our article advocates the importance of having formalized Human Rights Policy among businesses. This article offers a quick guide and useful references and samples in the crafting of a Human Rights Policy.

What are Human Rights?

UN defines Human Rights as the basic standards of treatment to which all people are entitled to. In the business context, Human Rights cover how leaders treat their people and how employees deal with each other and with their stakeholders. Respect and Dignity, Diversity and Inclusion, Non-Discrimination, Fair and Humane treatment, Non-exploitation, and Equal Opportunity are some of the key themes that define Human Rights.

What is Human Rights Policy?

Based on the UN Guide, a Human Rights policy *"is a public statement adopted by the company's highest governing authority committing the company to respect international human rights standards and to do so by having policies and processes in place to identify, prevent or mitigate human rights risks, and remediate any adverse impact it has caused or contributed to. It should explicitly use the words "human rights".*

Why Have a Human Rights Policy?

There is no doubt about the morality of advocating human rights in businesses through a Human Rights Policy. It is simply the ethical thing to do. The UN Global Compact has laid down the foundational principle that *"Business enterprises should respect human rights."* To do this, the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights from UN High Commissioner on Human Rights explicitly stated that *business enterprises should express their commitment to meet this responsibility through a statement of policy.*

However, is there a business case for human rights for companies? Clearly, yes. A Harvard study on sustainability which includes Human Rights has concluded that *"High Sustainability companies significantly outperform their counterparts over the long-term, both in terms of stock market as well as accounting performance."*

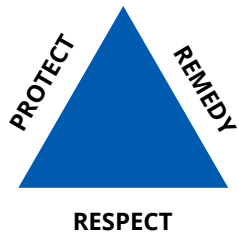
B Team, a group of renowned global business and sustainability leaders co-founded by Sir Richard Branson (Founder, Virgin Group) has issued a statement at the 2014 World Economic Forum in Davos which challenges business leaders to take a stronger stand on human rights.

As a company, it makes business sense to have a positive reputation by advocating human rights. When people in the organization respect each other's human rights, there can be higher level of engagement, and the work environment becomes more conducive for people to stay longer.

Basic Framework of a Human Rights Policy

The Guide for Business on How to Develop a Human Rights Policy outlines the guiding principles, steps, and elements essential to a Human Rights Policy.

To be consistent with the best practices, a company's Human Rights Policy should integrate the **Respect-Protect-Remedy Framework**.



Respect – What Human Rights that apply in the workplace should be advocated and respected? What behaviors are expected of leaders and employees with regards to respecting human rights?

Protect – What are the Due Diligence process that enables the identification, prevention, and mitigation of any impact on Human Rights?

Remedy – What are the corrective measures and mechanisms to handle any violation of Human Rights?

The Respect-Protect-Remedy framework of Human Rights policy also calls for clear integration and alignment with other corporate policies and practices such as Code of Business Conduct, Grievance, Discipline, Risk Management, Procurement, Recruitment, Training, and others.

Who should Write the Human Rights Policy?

HR is the key driver of Human Rights Policy. HR can take a collaborative approach by working with leaders from Sustainability, Corporate Governance, those involve in managing corporate Reputation. Human Rights Policy can also be embedded in the company's Procurement Policy as part of requirements for selecting suppliers, hence, Finance and Supply Chain Management can also be involved in the crafting and review of the Human Rights Policy.

What is the Right Approach to Writing Human Rights Policy: Stand Alone vs Embedded?

Human Rights Policy can be a standalone policy statement. It can also be incorporated to a company's Code of Ethics or Business Conduct. Both approaches are acceptable.

Global companies like NRI, 3M, or Rohm Semiconductor have their separate Human Rights Policies. Some Philippine companies like Converge ICT have their separate Human Rights Policy, which is also embedded into their Code of Ethics and Sustainability Commitments.

What's Next?

As Branson and his B Team cohorts eloquently stated, "We all stand to gain when businesses make human rights a priority. Where society thrives, so does business." Thus, it is now high time for corporate leaders, HR, CSR and Sustainability professionals to advocate human rights in the business through a formalized Human Rights Policy as an essential aspect of sustainability culture and sustainable business practices.

References

A. Sample Human Rights Policy

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B. Articles and Guides

Business Case for Human Rights, Cherie Blair, World Justice Project
<The Business Case for Human Rights | World Justice Project>

[Davos Dispatch: Richard Branson and The B Team Make Business Case For Human Rights \(forbes.com\)](Davos Dispatch: Richard Branson and The B Team Make Business Case For Human Rights (forbes.com))

A Guide for Business - How to develop a Human Rights Policy (UN Global Compact)
<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Business/guide-business-hr-policy.pdf>

Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UN Human Rights Office of the Commissioner)
[GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf_\(ohchr.org\)](GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf_(ohchr.org))

Universal Declaration of Human Rights
<OHCHR | Universal Declaration of Human Rights - English>

International Bill of Human Rights
<OHCHR | International Bill of Human Rights>

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Jun Roy is the OD Consulting Head of Nomura Research Institute – Manila Branch. NRI is a leading global private think tank, systems integrator, and management consulting from Japan with branches in the world's major cities.

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