

## Joint business statement to the Government of Ghana on responsible business conduct

We, representatives of Ghanaian companies from a variety of sectors, participated in a two-day workshop on "responsible business conduct" in Kumasi in September 2017 convened by Ghana Employers' Association and the International Organisation of Employers.<sup>1</sup>

We learned about the importance of acting responsibly and, importantly, *how* we can prevent and respond to impacts on people and the planet caused by our business activities and through our business relationships.

### Commitment

We recognise that business can have both a positive and negative impact on people, the planet and prosperity and we are committed to making a meaningful contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals.

### Request to the Government

In order for business to play its role in ensuring sustainable development and respect for human rights, we call upon the Government of Ghana to urgently step up its action to create an enabling environment for *all* companies to act responsibly.

We wish to make the following concrete points:

1. **Informality** is one of Ghana's biggest challenges and a systemic issue. We urge the Government to focus on supporting job creation in the formal sector and ending the informal economy. For example, increased regulation limits workers' entry into the formal economy because it harms the ability of companies to create employment and bring people out of informality. Skills development and capacity building is essential for many countries' development so they become knowledge-based economies.
2. **We urge the Government to support businesses to act responsibly:**
  - This means providing guidance, training and capacity building to companies of all sectors and sizes to help them understand and implement international standards such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
  - Business needs to operate on a level playing field where the same rules and policies apply to *all* companies, including proper enforcement of laws.
  - The country's underlying economy and bureaucracy, such as high interest rates, the tax code and the procedures to run a business, need urgent attention to allow companies to focus on job creation, their operations and their impacts.
  - The Government should champion national companies that demonstrate responsible business conduct, especially over foreign companies that may not meet the same standards and cause harmful impacts in our country.
  - Education and awareness raising of global standards is important. We recognise that business can help support the Government to bring the main elements of responsible business conduct to wider attention, including in school curriculums.

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<sup>1</sup> The workshop, from 18-19 September, was co-funded by the European Union and led by the International Organisation of Employers, GRI, Centro Vincular and the Ghana Employers' Association.

**3. We call upon the Government to reward businesses that act responsibly.**

- Taking the necessary steps to act responsibly, such as through undertaking human rights due diligence, takes time. It is a process that allows a company to prevent and address harms, as well as create opportunities for people.
- The Government should explore ways to actively reward those companies that know the risks that their activities and supply chain may have on people and the planet and also show how they are managing those risks.
- Innovative ideas may include: exploring how companies that act responsibly can receive tax credits/relief or better access to loans, such as in the case of export credit and insurance.

**4. The Government should "lead by example" through its own activities as an economic actor.**

- The UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights said in 2016 that "Governments seem to forget that they are economic actors in their own right."<sup>2</sup> It is, therefore, hypocritical for the Government to expect more of the private sector than of the companies that it owns or controls. We urge the Government to take the necessary steps to ensure that its companies act responsibly in accordance with international standards.
- Similarly, we call on the Government to ensure that it causes no harm to human rights or the environment in its own procurement practices.

**Company signatures**

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<sup>2</sup> UN Working Group on Business & Human Rights (2016):  
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=20123&LangID=E>