



## V Regional Forum on Business and Human Rights for Latin America and the Caribbean

### Realising responsible business conduct in difficult times: Turning challenges into opportunities (Virtual week)

7 to 11 September 2020  
Plenary sessions: 8 and 11 September

#### Concept Note

#### INTRODUCTION

Building on the successful experience of previous years, the V Regional Forum on Business and Human Rights for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC BHR Forum) will be held virtually in September 2020.

Over the years, the LAC BHR Forum has become a key gathering on business and human rights for Governments, companies and civil society alike, and one of the most important human rights meetings in the Americas. It provides a platform through which a wide array of actors can periodically exchange information on progress and challenges regarding States' legal and institutional frameworks, corporate policies, and industry-level and multi-stakeholder initiatives, in one of the most dynamic regions in relation to the business and human rights agenda. It also offers a space through which civil society organisations, local communities and indigenous peoples can share their experiences and concerns in relation to the impacts of business activities.

This year the LAC BHR Forum – which will be held virtually over a week for the first time – will take place in the context of the responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic poses unprecedented challenges for the LAC region, while uncovering pre-existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. The calls to put people and the planet at the centre of the responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic and social consequences, as well as to ensure an inclusive, responsible and sustainable recovery have been unanimous. In this context, and among other salient issues, the Forum will explore how the observance of responsible business conduct (RBC) standards can contribute to the definition and implementation of

sustainable and rights-compatible COVID-19 responses and other global challenges such as climate and environmental emergencies.<sup>1</sup>

## PROGRAMME

In light of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which prevents from organising a physical meeting in September 2020, this year the LAC BHR Forum will take the form of a virtual working week, between 7 and 11 September.

Two plenary sessions will be held at the beginning and at the end of the Forum's week, on 8 and 11 September 2020, with a High-Level Open Plenary on 8 September. On both days, the thematic discussions will start with plenary sessions, followed by more focused and interactive discussions in break-out rooms. The debates during the plenary sessions of the Forum will be informed by stakeholders' position statements and background documents that will be posted previously on the Forum's website.

The rest of the days of the Forum's week (7, 9 and 10 September) will host a myriad of activities including side events, capacity-building workshops, and stakeholder meetings. In addition, snapshot sessions will allow participants to briefly present ongoing BHR-related initiatives, projects and case studies.

The full programme of the Forum's week is available soon on the [Forum's website](#), together with the list of panellists.

## OBJECTIVES

- Explore how **Governments and businesses address and mitigate the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic**, and promote RBC as a tool for an inclusive, responsible and sustainable recovery, respectful of human and labour rights and the environment.
- **Track the progress made by Governments in implementing the UNGPs and promoting RBC in the LAC region**, especially regarding National Action Plans on Business and Human Rights (NAPs) and other normative and regulatory frameworks to strengthen the prevention of business-related human rights abuses.
- **Share businesses' best practices on due diligence** and other RBC measures aimed at meeting their corporate responsibility to respect human rights, in order to prevent adverse impacts on people and the environment and provide remedy when abuse occurs.
- Explore how governments and stakeholders can promote **access to remedy mechanisms** and build a **coherent system of effective remedies** for business impacts. **The role of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and National Contact Points for RBC (NCPs)** in this context will also be discussed.

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<sup>1</sup> See Joint Statement by the ILO, the OECD, the OHCHR, the REDESCA of the IACHR, the UNICEF, the UN Global Compact and the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights: "[Joining forces in Latin America and the Caribbean to help minimise the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) crisis and foster responsible and sustainable businesses](#)" (April 2020).

- Raise awareness of the **concerns and challenges faced by civil society actors, including CSOs, community members, indigenous peoples and workers** regarding the adverse impacts of business activities on human rights, including impacts in the areas of work and the environment.
- Draw lessons from **Governments' and businesses' actions to engage with interested stakeholders, including indigenous peoples, and to protect human rights defenders and prevent reprisals against them.**
- Raise awareness on the **connection between climate change and business and human rights issues, including the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on climate action.**
- **Strengthen the capacity of stakeholders** in relation to the business and human rights agenda and international RBC standards to participate meaningfully and equally in the development and implementation of relevant RBC initiatives, including the forum.
- **Facilitate the exchange** of good RBC practices, peer-to-peer learning, inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogue, and networking opportunities among regional actors.
- Contribute to the [UN Working Group's project](#) to **take stock of the first ten years of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights** and develop a **roadmap** for global implementation between now and 2030."

Cross-cutting issues including gender equality and the protection of the rights of groups in vulnerable position (including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, children, youth, migrants and LGBTBI people) will be mainstreamed throughout the different sessions of the Forum.

## PARTICIPATION

Representatives of State institutions, companies, trade unions, civil society organisations, indigenous peoples and local communities, law firms, investors, international and regional organisations, NCPs, NHRIs, the academia and the media are invited to participate in the LAC BHR Forum.

The sessions of the two official days of the Forum's week will be open to all participants.

## ABOUT THE REGIONAL FORUM

The LAC BHR Forum is organised by the [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\) for Central America](#) and [the United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights](#). The Forum is organised in collaboration with the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\)](#) and supported by the European Union (EU), under the project [Responsible Business Conduct in Latin America and the Caribbean \(RBCLAC\)](#),

The RBCLAC project aims at promoting responsible business conduct practices in line with international standards, including the [United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) (UNGPs), the [OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises](#) and the [ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy](#).

The first session of the Forum was held in Medellín, Colombia, in 2013. Since then, the Forum has become the main multi-stakeholder platform of exchange of good practice and peer-to-peer learning in relation to

human rights and business activities in the region. As in previous years, the debates of the Regional Forum will feed into the 9<sup>th</sup> session of the [UN Forum on Business and Human Rights, to be held from 16 to 18 November 2020](#) in Geneva, which will focus on the necessary actions to foster corporate respect for human rights, with a particular focus on preventive actions.