

*Commemorating the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 22<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary of South Africa's Democratic Constitution*

**A CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS, BUSINESS**

**AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

**USING A PRINCIPLES-BASED APPROACH TO THE GLOBAL GOALS**

**Introduction**

*The upcoming Conference on Business and Human Rights will reflect and take stock of how far South Africa has come as a country since the promulgation of the democratic Constitution of 1996. It will envision a South Africa where human rights are protected, respected and fulfilled. The Conference will bring business leaders and the youth to take stock and envision this future together; and to explore how to support and realise the opportunities presented by the Youth Dividend through Sustainable Development Goals.*

2018 marks the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Adopted on 10 December 1948, the historic document set the fundamental rights that would be protected internationally, recognising human rights as the foundation for freedom, justice and peace everywhere.

During the same year in 1948, South Africa went against the global tide and appetite for human rights, entrenching apartheid for the next 46 years to 1994. But the UDHR influenced South Africa's democratic Constitution, signed into law on 10 December 1996, with a robust and detailed Bill of Rights.

South Africa's Bill of Rights integrates social, economic and cultural rights; as well as political and civil rights. The rights are interrelated, legally enforceable and binding of all organs of State. The Bill of Rights stipulates that the State must "respect, protect, promote and fulfil human rights".

While significant constitutional gains have been made since 1996, South Africa remains a highly unequal country, with pervasive levels of poverty and unemployment. Young people, who account for 63.5% of South Africa's total unemployed, are the most affected by these challenges. StatsSA (2018) reports that 10,3 million (32,4%) South Africans aged 15-24 are still not in employment, education or training (NEET). Youth unemployment is a denial of basic economic rights. Youth under-education and under-skilling is an infringement of the rights to human dignity; equality; freedom & security; the right to a healthy environment; housing; education; healthcare, food, water and social security.

As the world commemorates the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the UDHR and as South Africa celebrates 22 years of the democratic Constitution, we must reflect on this crisis of youth and achievement of their human rights. In the year of the centenary of two outstanding human rights champions, the late President Nelson Mandela and Mama Albertina Sisulu, it is an opportune time for key stakeholders including business, government and civil society to recommit to building a South Africa that protects, respects and promotes human rights- especially for the next generation to lead- as required by the Constitution.

## **Business Responsibility to Respect Human Rights**

Business have a minimum responsibility to respect rights and through effective due diligence, avoid doing harm through their operations, products or third-party relationships. When a business infringes on human rights, they have a responsibility to address the negative impacts caused. Both the State and Business have an obligation to provide access to effective remedy in cases of adverse impacts on human rights.

Business can also promote the fulfilment of rights, by making positive contributions to society and in communities of operations. But doing good cannot offset the primary responsibility to respect rights, which essentially means doing no harm.

It is beneficial for business to respect and promote human rights, as this ensures the building of positive relationships with stakeholders and a stronger social license to operate. This is important in the context of the expectations for responsible business from young consumers, who are estimated to spend more than R120 billion per annum in South Africa.

## **Taking Stock and Reflecting on Business and Human Rights in South Africa**

The upcoming one-day Business Conference will take stock of South Africa's Constitution and the Bill of Rights, underpinned by the following key guiding questions:

- What does the Constitution and Bill of Rights mean for business?
- How far we have come as a country and as business in advancing the Bill of Rights?
- What do we envision the future to be, especially for young people, and how can business and young people engage more effectively?
- How can business embed human rights more intentionally to effectively drive action on the Global Goals?

## **Structure of the Conference**

The conference on business, human rights and the future of South Africa will be structured as follows:

1. **A keynote address:** To take stock and reflect on human rights achievements in the past 22 years, remaining challenges and what business needs to do to play a much stronger role in respecting and advancing human rights.
2. **Panel 1:** A High-Level Panel to reflect on the Constitution & the Bill of Rights: Achievements, Challenges and Opportunities for Business. This panel will constitute business leaders, government, academia and the Office of the UN High Commission on Human Rights. The Panel will be facilitated and aims to understand how organised entities envision the future and practical ways to promote the fulfilment of human rights.
3. **Panel 2: Human Rights, Young People and Business:** What are the expectations of Young People for a human rights-driven business? In what ways does business engage with Young People as a key stakeholder? And what are the opportunities available to business through the SDGs to address the needs and aspirations of young people?
4. **Panel 3: Company Case Studies:** What are some of the practical initiatives that companies take both to respect (do no harm) and to promote (do good) human rights? To what extent do companies centre Young People in their strategies and operations? What impact are these initiatives having and are they scalable? Are there opportunities for collaboration on some of the good practices, in order to achieve the required scale and impact?

## **Duration of Conference**

The Conference will begin at 09:00 and end with a Networking Lunch Session by 15:00.