



## INTERNATIONAL WEBINARS AND LIVE EVENTS

### Business, the economy, and livelihoods in a COVID-19 world

By RightOn – 10 June 2020

Moderated by Marc Limon (Director, URG) and Jovan Kurblija (Director, DiploFoundation):

As countries re-open their economies, it is vital that we learn the lessons from the crisis, and we build back better. If we do not, the small window of opportunity we have will be lost. This window of opportunity will last only a few months, rather than years.

Ms Deborah Greenfield - Deputy Director-General for Policy at ILO:

**Labour rights are human rights** and are of paramount importance during a crisis. There is a particular role for governments in this. In many countries, particularly in developed economies, government have been dealing with the urgency of the matter.

**Emergency financial assistance** were required to facilitate survival and to maintain levels of employment. Countries that have preserved **employment relationships** are now in a stronger position to recover better. Countries with **strong social protection** systems are also more favourable position. **Countries are re-discovering many good practices** throughout this crisis.

We will have a virtual summit beginning July where we expect issues to be discussed. For us, **the future of work** we focus on since many years is here. Not as we anticipated, but it is here. We need principles that carry us towards a **sustainable recovery**.

We have an **enormous opportunity to build towards a carbon neutral economy**. We see the massive need for jobs that have come out of the crisis. For ILO, the work on “just transition” started years ago. **Economic sustainability and environment sustainability are interconnected**.

Mr Jean-Yves Art - Senior Director in charge of Strategic Partnerships at Microsoft:

**Digital technologies** will be an important element in the recovery. IT techs were a **major tool for everyone throughout the crisis**, enabling business to continue operating, teachers to teach etc. The IT will continue to **play this central role in the recovery**.

**New social contract:** digital tech and IT will be able to **contribute more to the society**. It will be important to continue enabling access to all, in order to enable the access to **fundamental rights**.

Regarding **taxation**, it is a question that pre-dates Covid-19. The public deficit that will result from the Covid-19 response is likely to make the **question of tax contribution more pressing**.

There is a disconnect between the way the economy has evolved. We have seen **states remaining into their territorial scopes**, while companies have been **expanding internationally**.

Dr Dorothee Baumann-Pauly – Director, Geneva Centre for Business and Human Rights:

Notions of **building back better** are really getting more attention today. For many, this pandemic has triggered a **fundamental reflexion** on the role they have to play in the global economy.

This pandemic showed that **companies need to be ready**. Any effort heading towards business as usual will not help the economy to be sustainable. There are increasing numbers of external

drivers for companies to be ready: one of them is **regulation**. It is a tool on the rise in Europe, through different national legislations.

Do companies know how to be ready and elaborate **business models respecting human rights**? Some individual examples of companies transitioned to business models that integrate human rights at the core of their practices. We need more companies that **pioneer in the research of business models**, leading the way in **establishing human rights standards**.

[Dr Michael K. Addo - Professor of Law at the University of Notre Dame:](#)

We have come a very long way in terms of **human rights and business**, from unacceptable interference in the market to an important element of the market.

Many companies have made **commitments in support of human rights**, but when they confront it to economic profit, very few succeed in **prioritizing human rights**.

**Levels of unemployment during Covid-19** is a good indicator to assess the way companies have been behaving throughout the crisis.

**Covid-19 really poses a challenge**. Should we be looking beyond business and human rights? The subject itself remains very sensitive. It is the time to take **human rights to a broader economic environment**.

[Ms Elin Wrzoncki - Department Director for Human Rights and Business at the Danish Institute for Human Rights:](#)

**Denmark**, with other countries, have included specific clauses regarding companies doing tax evasion, in its **Covid-19 response package**. It is an important political signalling, there is huge support for this type of measures. However, if you look at what is behind this, this type of clauses does not have any practical consequences.

Other types of clauses have been included in recovery packages. Denmark mentioned **the UN guiding principles as a framework to respect**. We see new opportunities arising, with the EU looking at possible **legislations to enhance the adoption of smart models**.

The **recovery packages are a very powerful** tool to integrate some additional requirements on businesses, for example on **carbon emissions**. What is also very important is to make sure that they are implemented in a transparent way.