African Union and Partners Organize First Ever African Business and Human Rights Forum to Promote Corporate Accountability in Africa

The first ever African Business and Human Rights Forum was held in Accra, Ghana, from 12 to 13 October 2022 to take stock of progress and discuss challenges and opportunities for promoting responsible business and human rights conduct and corporate accountability in Africa. It was convened by the African Union (AU) and co-organized by the AU, the United Nations Development Programme, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights and GIZ, in close collaboration with local and regional, continental and international actors, such as the African Coalition for Corporate Accountability (ACCA), the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI), and other development partners and hosted by the Government of the Republic of Ghana.

Speaking at the opening ceremony on behalf of Amb. Bankole Adeoye, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Mr. Issaka Garba Abdou, Ag. Head of Governance and Human Rights Division stated that the objectives of the forum were to contribute to Africa’s efforts to create awareness on Business and Human Rights among various stakeholders including Business enterprises and to ensure that all Member States are fully engaged in its implementation guided by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). He also called on the AU Member States to consider adopting the AU Draft Policy on Business and Human Rights. He then stressed on importance of businesses and civil society organizations for the promotion development and responsible business practices and to mainstream human rights standards in the industry across Africa. Speaking under thematic sessions, Mr. John Ikubaje, Senior Political Officer at the PAPS Department, added that the AU Draft Policy underlines three fundamental principles, namely, states’ duty to protect, business responsibility to respect human rights in business conduct and access to remedies for affected communities. Meanwhile, Ms. Seraphine Kando, Human Rights Officer at the PAPS Department, noted that states are encouraged to facilitate access to effective remedies for business and human rights violations by putting in place accessible and acceptable legislative, administrative, judicial and non-judicial measures and benchmarks.

The Forum underlined critical issues for sustaining the business and human rights agenda in Africa, including coherence in aligning initiatives on the continent at national, regional and sub-regional levels with the UN Guiding Principles (UNGPs) on Business and Human Rights, the commitment of Member States, as well as the development of National Action Plans (NAPs), and impact in translating the implementation of these NAPs into actual human development and transformation of lives and livelihoods at local levels by advancing better labour standards, better human rights conditions,
gender justice and child protection. The UNGPs aim to promote human rights due diligence, meaningful stakeholder engagement and remedies to human rights violations. It is a powerful tool for States, businesses, and all other stakeholders to leverage the great potential of responsible business as a necessary means for tackling human rights violations in business environment and to realize sustainable development.

The AU and partners thanked the government and people of Ghana for hosting this first edition of the African Business and Human Rights Forum while committing to organize these exchanges between governments, private sector actors, civil society organizations and development partners annually in Africa.

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