

The Business Leaders Initiative on Human Rights (BLIHR)

The Business Leaders Initiative on Human Rights (BLIHR) began in 2003 for an initial three year period **to help lead and develop the corporate response to human rights**. We set ourselves the objective of finding “practical ways of applying the aspirations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights within a business context and to inspire other businesses to do likewise”.

The Honorary Chair of BLIHR is **Mary Robinson**, President of Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative, former President of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The Initiative was founded by seven companies: ABB Ltd, Barclays plc, MTV Networks Europe, National Grid plc, Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development, Novo Nordisk and The Body Shop International plc. During 2004, Hewlett-Packard Company, Statoil and Gap Inc. joined the initiative. In June 2006, Alcan Inc. and AREVA joined. In October 2006, Ericsson and General Electric joined BLIHR, bringing the total number of companies to 13.

BLIHR is advised by two leading experts in the field of business and human rights, Professor Alan Miller and Sune Skadegaard Thorsen. Both are international human rights lawyers and have been involved with the initiative since its creation in 2003.

At the end of the initial three-year phase of the initiative, we agreed that there was still much to be done in this area and still the need for further understanding of the issues and practical tools for business. As we enter the second phase of the initiative, our primary objective remains as set out above.

The companies participating in the Business Leaders Initiative on Human Rights are committed to integrating concern for human rights into their work and to addressing specific dilemmas within each of their sectors that will encourage the development of further tools that can be useful for others.

For 2006-2009, the priorities for BLIHR are two-fold:

1. Integrating human rights into business management
2. Mainstreaming human rights into the global business community

The first element of BLIHR's work is closely linked to the joint publication "A Guide for Integrating Human Rights into Business Management" which was produced in cooperation with the United Nations. It includes such focused projects as BLIHR's work on Good Governance in Sensitive Countries and Accountability Mechanisms. In addition, it is recognised that minimum standards are essential for a level playing field to be developed in this area and so standard setting and indicators will play a large part in all of BLIHR's work.

The second element of BLIHR's work relates to engagement with a wider business audience and this has been a priority for BLIHR since its inception. Since 2005 BLIHR has also been in a position to engage with business in emerging economies in Africa, Asia and Latin America working in close partnership with regional and national partners as well as the United Nations.

For 2006-2009, there is a particular focus on specific business sectors where human rights awareness is not yet developed, as well as the best ways of working with business, business associations, governments, NGOs, trade unions and communities between different global regions and within specific countries.

