

Since October 1999 representatives of the Federal Government, business associations, trade unions and non-governmental organisations have met several times to discuss their responsibility for implementing and preserving human rights. By issuing this Joint Declaration, the signatories are expressing their determination to continue this constructive dialogue in order to develop and promote concrete steps towards comprehensive protection for human rights.

International protection of human rights and economic activity

Joint Declaration

by

**the Federal Government,
the Federation of German Industries,
the Confederation of German Employers' Associations,
the German Trade Union Federation (DGB),
Forum Menschenrechte (Human Rights Forum)
and the Association of German Development NGOs**

The global enforcement of human rights presents a huge challenge to politicians, the business community, trade unions and civil society. To respect the dignity of every individual and to create legal conditions in which human rights can become established is not only a fundamental ethical imperative, but also a prerequisite for lasting political stability and for economic and social development throughout the world.

The universal preservation of human rights is primarily a task for governments. Indeed, the Federal Government has declared this to be a guiding principle of German foreign policy. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, however, also obliges individuals and all groups in society, and thereby also economic players, to help secure human rights. As a result of globalisation, the relevance of this task in practice is growing. It becomes clear in this context that protecting fundamental freedoms, adhering to the rule of law and ensuring political and social harmony as the foundation for national stability is also in the interest of companies operating internationally.

Politicians, businessmen, the trade unions and non-governmental organisations should above all commit themselves within their immediate field of responsibility to the promotion and realisation of the human rights anchored in the two United Nations human rights pacts. In addition, however, we are called upon by the Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to promote all human rights anchored in the Declaration and to secure

through progressive measures, national and international, their universal and effective recognition and observance. In particular, we should ensure that we do not share the responsibility for any human rights violations and that we do not contribute to the escalation of conflicts in crisis-ridden areas.

We pay tribute to all those in politics, business, the trade unions and civil society who are committed to the protection and promotion of human rights. We believe it important that German companies develop through concrete corporate decisions initiatives worthy of imitation with a view to helping to realise human rights.

We welcome the initiative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, to encourage companies to respect fundamental human rights, labour and environmental standards under the Global Compact. It is now imperative that these principles be put into practice. Many companies, German ones included, have already pledged their support for the Global Compact.

We also welcome the new version of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises adopted in June 2000. These Guidelines contain recommendations for responsible corporate practices, not least in the field of human rights and employment rights. The Federal Government and the organisations represented in the working group are also committed to these rights.

At national level we see our joint task as being to use all the possibilities open to us to seek respect for human rights. We therefore together commit ourselves to respect and promote the principles laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the international human rights pacts and conventions. These include the basic employment rights set forth in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work of 18 June 1998, which are also covered by ILO Conventions: guaranteed right to freedom of association and to collective bargaining, elimination of all forms of forced labour, effective abolition of child labour and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

If they are to prevail in the long term, human rights must be anchored not only in government institutions, companies and organisations, but also in the hearts and minds of the people. Society's commitment to human rights is therefore imperative. This is true of all countries in the world, but particularly those in which human rights are seriously violated. We ourselves want to do our utmost to participate actively in the promotion and strengthening of world-wide human rights protection. This Joint Declaration is a basis for our further endeavours to

develop and promote practical steps. We call upon politicians, the business community, the trade unions and civil society to play their part through concrete action to protect all human rights.

Berlin, 3 May 2002