

## UN experts urge Canada to take tougher line on business-related rights abuses

Written by Joan Russow

Monday, 05 June 2017 07:31 - Last Updated Monday, 05 June 2017 07:45

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**OTTAWA / GENEVA (1 June 2017) – The United Nations Working Group on business and human rights has urged the Canadian authorities and business sector to step up their efforts to prevent and address adverse human rights impacts of business activities, both at home and abroad.**

A delegation of the expert panel also called for meaningful consultation and engagement with indigenous peoples, at the [end of its first official visit to Canada](#) .

“As Canada seeks to advance the monumental task of reconciliation with indigenous communities, and create a new nation-to-nation relationship based on equal respect and dignity, the Government and businesses must integrate indigenous peoples’ rights into their policies and practices governing the exploitation of natural resources,” said human rights expert Surya Deva, vice-chairperson of the Working Group.

“Meaningful consultation and holistic impact assessment can be a driving force behind the righting of wrongs committed in the past,” he added.

He highlighted international standards which needed to be adhered to, including the principle of free prior and informed consent under the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) , and the concept of human rights due diligence under the [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) .

The delegation also stressed that human rights defenders and environmentalists had to be protected from harassment and violence, not only in Canada but also in countries where Canadian companies were operating.

“It is imperative that both Government authorities and businesses show leadership and take a clear stance that attacks on individuals and communities will not be tolerated,” said Anita Ramasastry, the other member of the Working Group’s delegation. “The Canadian Government’s new policy guidelines on supporting human rights defenders - Voices at Risk - is a promising first step in this regard.”

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The experts also noted and welcomed positive moves to promote gender equality. “We are encouraged to see that there is a strong commitment to advancing women’s roles in society throughout Canada and within the private sector,” said Ms. Ramasastry.

During their visit, the experts met officials including the Corporate Social Responsibility Counsellor and the National Contact Point (NCP) to discuss ways of ensuring that victims of human rights abuses had sufficient access to systems which addressed their needs.

“We acknowledge the efforts of the Government to provide remedies, but feel there are still significant gaps that need to be addressed, as victims of rights abuses still struggle to access adequate and timely remedies,” said Mr. Deva.

The Working Group also held consultations with federal and provincial government representatives in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, as well as with representatives of indigenous peoples, civil society organizations, trade unions and businesses.

The Working Group’s final report, including findings and key recommendations, will be presented to the UN Human Rights Council in June 2018.

ENDS

The [Working Group on human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises](#) was established by the UN Human Rights Council in June 2011. Its current members are:

**Mr. Michael Addo** (current Chairperson), **Mr.**

**Surya Deva**

(current vice chair),

**Mr. Dante Pesce**

,

**Ms.**

**Anita Ramasastry**

and

**Mr. Pavel Sulyandziga**

The Working Groups are part of what is known as the [Special Procedures](#) of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council’s independent human rights monitoring mechanisms. The Working Groups report to the Human Rights Council and to the UN General Assembly. Special Procedures mandate-holders are independent human rights experts appointed by the Human Rights Council to address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. The experts are not UN staff and are independent from any government or organization. They serve in their individual capacity and do not receive a salary for their work.

UN Human Rights, country page: [Canada](#)

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