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An Organizational Integrity Perspective on the UN Protect, Respect, and Remedy Framework on Business and Human Rights

Since at least 1991 business ethics scholars have provided reasons to support the judgment that corporations and other business enterprises have a basic duty to respect human rights. Various international organizations including the ILO (1977, 2000) and the OECD (2000) have provided guidelines for corporate human rights conduct. In 2011 the UN Human Rights Council adapted a tripartite framework regarding business and human rights that includes a state duty to protect individuals against the violation of human rights by third parties, a corporate duty to respect human rights, and remedial action in cases of human rights violations.

While the precise scope and content of the duties has been contested, many corporations and business organizations have also endorsed the proposition that businesses have human rights duties. These various initiatives and agreements may be seen to reflect a judgment of public reason that businesses are properly regarded as responsible for meeting certain human rights duties in their global operations. In the last ten years a variety of international actors have employed human rights impact assessments to evaluate corporate activity. These assessments are produced, in part, with the expectation that corporate performance on human rights is subject to modification and improvement. Since most organizational activity is subject to such change, this is a reasonable expectation. However, corporations and other businesses interested in adapting or improving human rights performance confront the challenge of incorporating respect for rights into business policy. The empirical literature on the management of ethics in organizations provides guidance for business professionals with respect to the adaptation and implementation of human rights policies. Best practices in managing organizational human rights policies are recommended. Organizational human rights policies may be seen as one element of global business and human rights infrastructure.