

**Intervention by Guy Ryder, General Secretary,
International Trade Union Confederation
Opening Plenary, Global Compact Leaders' Summit
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I welcome the opportunity to address this Leaders' Summit on behalf of the international labour movement, newly united in the International Trade Union Confederation now representing 168 million workers in 153 countries.

This gathering is a tribute to the authority that the United Nations, and the leadership that its Secretary-General bring to the complex issues of corporate social responsibility.

The Global Compact was created to address the behaviour of business specifically and some of the more pressing issues of globalisation generally.

It is important for the success of this Summit that as it takes up the specific responsibilities set out in the 10 principles of the Compact it remains mindful of the more general context which is a governance crisis which threatens the promise that globalisation brings and even its future.

The United Nations itself is critically important to the challenge, which we all share, of creating a fairer and a sustainable globalisation, and as we see it the Global Compact must contribute to that objective.

It will not, by itself, correct growing inequality and injustice, nor reverse the fall in the share of world income going to working families now at historic lows at a time of record levels of corporate profits. Nor will it do better by going beyond its proper scope, action, or setting itself goals it cannot be expected to meet.

Corporate citizenship is at the heart of the Compact's moving philosophy. And corporate citizens, like the individual citizens we all are, are required to obey certain rules and laws. These are not voluntarily contracted, but standards decided upon, and implemented as a matter of public policy.

Obvious as that proposition may appear, it has not prevented a great deal of confusion in the field of corporate social responsibility concerning the respective roles of the state and of private enterprise and between that behaviour which is obligatory and that which may be considered voluntary.

This Summit will do well to ensure that the Compact does not fall victim to any such confusion. And the fact that the Compact is founded very firmly in principles which are in turn grounded in international law – in the case of labour the Conventions of the International Labour Organisation – certainly helps us in this endeavour. So too does the simple, but sometimes neglected, proposition that it is for society to determine what the responsibilities of business are towards it and not for business to proclaim what it considers its responsibilities to be.

The Global Compact shares with all other corporate social responsibility initiatives a dependence upon adequate legal regulation as a bedrock of

minimum standards upon which acceptable and additional voluntary initiatives can be built. Where any initiative seeks to displace legal regulation, or where it is adduced as evidence that regulation is outmoded or not needed, and that does happen, then we would be regressing not progressing.

Above all “do no harm” is a dictum which this Summit should take to heart, so that it really is in a position to help the process of putting into place the type of governance that is necessary to the long-term future of globalisation.

Counter-intuitive as it might seem, the international trade union movement’s experience is that much of the business community with which it maintains positive relations and dialogue shares with it common views on the need for clear and firm international rules concerning corporate behaviour, the example of regulation of carbon emissions being a recent case in point.

Secretary-General,

Let me conclude by underlining that trade unions attach great importance to all of the principles of the Global Compact and believe that they cannot be addressed selectively by its signatories but must be acted upon in an integrated manner. The ITUC practices what it preaches in this regard, has a record of activity in each of the areas covered and is looking particularly to intensify its work the environment, including through close cooperation with UNEP.

This said, we are concerned that activities on the labour principles of the Compact receive the attention that they should, and that among them, the right to organise and to bargain collectively in particular.

It is a reality which sits uncomfortably beside the ethos of this event that many laws are in force around the world which prevent workers from exercising their right to organise, and that parts of industry spends millions to prevent trade unions from representing their employees. These are some of the reasons, I think, why the Global Compact has had greater difficulty addressing these principles than others.

We are not dealing here with technical problems susceptible to technical solutions, but rather complex arrangements for the fair resolution of competing interests with the political content that can imply.

Nevertheless, the obligations of Global Compact signatories here are actually clear and quite simple – in principle at least: to have an open and positive attitude to trade union organisation of their employees and to engage with them in the effective realisation of the right to collective bargaining.

Our highest expectation of this Summit, to which we came with real ambition, is that participants commit to meet these obligations and act on them once we have gone home.

Thank you