



BSR Conference 2010  
**Innovate. Integrate. Inspire.**

## The Role of Business in Promoting Human Rights

Breakout Session Summary  
Thursday, November 4, 2010 | 10:15 a.m.-12.30 p.m.

### Speakers

- » **Pascale Guiffant**, Projects and Contracts Communication Manager, SUEZ Environnement
- » **Colin Maclay**, Managing Director, Berkman Center for Internet & Society, Harvard University
- » **Ursula Wynhoven**, Head, Policy and Legal, Special Assistant to the Executive Director, United Nations Global Compact Office
- » **Guy Morgan**, Manager, Advisory Services, BSR (moderator)

### Highlights

- » A strategic, informed and focused approach is needed for a successful human rights effort.
- » A multi-stakeholder approach—working alongside local governments, communities, investors, and other key stakeholder—is an effective way to tackle this issue. Timely response is critical, and this remains the challenge.
- » Tools and guidance tailored across specific issues and industry sectors can be accessed easily on several informational websites, including UNGC's [business portal](#), the Business and Human Rights [website](#), the [Global Business Initiative](#), and [business.un.org](#).

### Memorable Quotes

*"Coca-Cola has operations in more countries than there are countries in the United Nations. Obviously, business has an important role to play in human rights."*—Pascale Guiffant, SUEZ Environnement

*"There is sometimes a conflict between what businesses want to do to protect human rights and what governments want to do to promote their own agendas."*—Colin Maclay, Berkman Center for Internet & Society, Harvard University

*"Take a rights-aware approach and be conscious of the human rights consequences of the actions you take. And get help!"*—Ursula Wynhoven, United Nations Global Compact Office

### Overview

Morgan kicked off the session by pointing to the growing number of companies (currently at 271) that have a human rights policy and attesting to a global consensus that has emerged: All companies are starting to see a responsibility to respect human rights. This session focused on making the business case for companies to craft and implement human rights policies.

Wynhoven, the session's first speaker, offered examples of how companies can support and promote human rights. For instance, businesses can foster opportunities for girls to be educated, ultimately providing the company a broader and equitable workforce. Companies need to be strategic and aware of human rights approaches to doing business. They should consider joining



working groups and address specific issues such as women's empowerment principles and children's rights.

Guiffant discussed the history of SUEZ Environnement's water concession in Buenos Aires in 1993 and the ensuing problems it experienced with its business model. The water utility then revised its strategy to engage in dialogue with local governments, municipalities, and communities in all the countries in which it operates. SUEZ works in collaboration with NGOs, a strategy that has helped more than 10 million people connect to drinking water in emerging countries. In September, the company supported international recognition of the right to water and sanitation. However, SUEZ believes that it is the state's role to ensure the realization of this right.

Maclay highlighted the work done by the Global Network Initiative (GNI) in providing recent examples of how internet companies are coming into conflict with governments. For instance, Microsoft deleted a user's blog from its servers at the request of Chinese authorities. He said that companies began to tackle these issues through collaboration with the GNI, an organization that works with companies, investors, academics, and others to make this partnership possible.

There are two challenges in getting companies to sign up. First, they tend to join only when a crisis has hit, and secondly, companies are not sure what they are committing to upon joining the network.

The audience then broke into small groups. Guiffant and Maclay worked with them to discuss how individual companies can help support human rights at a company level and how multistakeholder groups can work to help support human rights. The first group put forth a few examples of how it would go about respecting human rights at a company level. Participants mentioned assessing how far their responsibility goes down the supply chains, multi-industry engagement for sustainable solutions, providing training to business partners on policy implementation, and involving the local government and key officials. Participants also stated that collaboration across the industry is inevitable when dealing with issues like privacy infringement of privacy, since big and small companies alike are hit. However, they noted that companies collaborate only when they see efficiencies to be gained.

Another group discussed ways in which multistakeholder groups can support and advance human rights. Working with prudent CEOs and the [United Nations Principles of Responsible Investment](#), like-minded stakeholders can greatly reduce the risks of corporate disasters.

---

Notes Sponsor

**VOLKSWAGEN**  
GROUP OF AMERICA