Corporate Human Rights Responsibilities

DAVID WEISSBRODT

This article begins with a discussion of why one should be concerned or at least interested in the human rights conduct of corporations. Hence, the first part of the article presents a couple of historical and current situations which require attention and standard-setting. The second part focuses on past efforts of international law and particularly international human rights law to deal with such non-state actors as corporations. The third part discusses five major attributes of the U.N. Human Rights Norms which built upon the previous efforts to deal with the human rights conduct of corporations. The fourth part traces the process by which the Norms were prepared and are now being considered by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. The fifth part identifies three principal issues raised by the opponents to the Norms. And the article concludes with an account of how the Norms are already being used by businesses, mutual funds, and others.

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1. Historical and Current Human Rights Concerns as to the Activities of Business

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the initiation of the Nuremberg trials of the Major War Criminals after World War II. During the following trials German industrialist Alfried Krupp and nine other officials of the huge Krupp industrial firm were convicted of charges relating, inter alia, to the use of slave labor. During that era the Krupp firm became an inextricable part of the German policy for occupied countries such as France, Norway, and Poland. The Krupp corporate officers received terms of imprisonment with Krupp himself being sentenced to twelve years imprisonment. In

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* David Weissbrodt. Regents Professor and Fredrikson & Byron Professor of Law, University of Minnesota. The author served as a member of the U.N. Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights during the period 1996-2003. He was elected the Chairperson of the Sub-Commission for the year 2001-02. He also served as a member of the Sub-Commission’s Working Group on the Working Methods and Activities of Transnational Corporations. This article, however, reflects his views and not necessarily the positions of those institutions. The author wishes to thank Muria Kruger, Bridget Marks, and Mary Rumsey for their assistance in preparing this article. University of Minnesota, Human Rights Center, Mondale Hall N-120, 229-19th Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA, phone: ++1-612-625-5027, e-mail: weiss001@umn.edu.