A place to stand upon
The development of a human rights compliance assessment for companies

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What Archimedes said of the mechanical powers, may be applied to Reason and Liberty: “Had we,” said he, “a place to stand upon, we might raise the world”.

Thomas Paine, The Rights of Man, 1792

This article discusses the main theoretical and conceptual challenges of defining the scope of corporate responsibilities with regard to human rights. The article argues that it is possible to modify the human rights obligations of governments to a business context. The article then examines the methodological as well as practical limitations of existing initiatives to rewrite international human rights law for companies. Finally, the article outlines the functionality and added value of the Human Rights Compliance Assessment (HRCA) developed by the Danish Institute for Human Rights.

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1. Introduction

Few companies today question their responsibilities regarding the environment. Human rights, on the other hand, have traditionally been seen as a political issue with governments as the greatest violators of rights, but also as the entities with the responsibility to protect and promote the same rights. This perspective changed dramatically during the 1990s when the publicity surrounding the operations of multina-