INITIAL STATEMENT

BY THE
BUSINESS LEADERS INITIATIVE ON HUMAN RIGHTS (BLIHR)
IN RESPONSE TO THE 2008 REPORT OF THE UN SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

(Protect, Respect and Remedy: a Framework for Business and Human Rights. Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises, John Ruggie – United Nations, 2008, A/HRC/8/5).

The Business Leaders Initiative on Human Rights (BLIHR) welcomes the latest report from the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on business and human rights, Professor John Ruggie. The Special Representative's report moves the business and human rights debate forward significantly both by setting out the key responsibilities of companies in relation to all rights they may impact and by stressing that governments must do more to foster corporate cultures which respect rights and close the governance gaps.

BLIHR is a business-led programme chaired by Mary Robinson and established in 2003. Our principal purpose is to find practical ways of applying the Universal Declaration of Human Rights within a business context and to inspire other businesses to do likewise. We have called for a common framework on business and human rights that would help to clarify the steps businesses should take in this area. As such, we support Professor Ruggie's establishment of a policy framework comprising the state duty to protect against abuses by third parties, the corporate responsibility to respect all internationally recognised human rights, and the need for more effective access to remedies. We are particularly pleased that Professor Ruggie sees all internationally recognised human rights as being relevant to this framework.

We support Professor Ruggie's emphasis on the state duty to protect human rights as a foundation of the human rights system, and also welcome his efforts to define business responsibilities in this area as distinct from those of states. In particular, we welcome the recognition of the corporate responsibility to respect human rights. It requires the performance of due diligence, which is not just a passive or reactive process. The responsibility to respect and its due diligence component form a very useful baseline for any business wishing to engage on human rights.

Moving forward, it would be helpful to clarify under what circumstances companies might have more extensive responsibilities in order to respect human rights.

We hope that our developing work will complement that of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and help other companies to better understand and meet the responsibility to respect. We are updating the 2006 'Guide for Integrating Human Rights into Business Management', a joint publication with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

and the UN Global Compact. We are also producing materials on subjects such as accountability measures, good governance in sensitive countries and also the business case in emerging economies. Additionally, we are continuing dialogue with a wide variety of organisations in this area to better understand what human rights and business means in practice.

We look forward to ongoing opportunities to engage with the Special Representative and other stakeholders individually and collectively – both as member companies of BLIHR and within our respective sectors.

Issued by the BLIHR Secretariat on 14 May 2008. For more information on BLIHR, please contact Kathryn Dovey (+33 6077 49711) or John Morrison (+44 7887 684 948); www.blihr.org.