

Website Sample Reading Task:

Multiple Choice Questions

Read the text about the human rights obligations of business organisations. Then choose the correct answer (A, B, C or D) for questions 1-6. Put a cross (X) in the correct box. The first one (0) has been done for you.

UN Norms for Business

The UN Norms for Business represent a major step forward in the process of establishing a common global framework for understanding the human rights responsibilities of businesses.

What are the UN Norms?

The Norms were put together by an expert body of the *UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights* and set out in a single, succinct statement a coherent and comprehensive list of the human rights obligations of companies. They do not create new legal obligations, but simply explain how existing obligations under international law are relevant to companies and their global operations.

The UN Norms do not seek to impose inappropriate responsibilities on businesses. They clearly state that companies only have responsibilities "within their respective spheres of activity and influence." Indeed the entire thrust of the UN Norms is to encourage the development of stable environments for investment and business, regulated by the rule of law, in which contracts are honored, corruption reduced, and where business enterprises, both foreign and domestic, have clearly defined rights and responsibilities.

Why are the UN Norms needed?

Governments have the primary responsibility for ensuring that companies respect human rights. But companies must also uphold human rights in their operations. With American companies operating in many different countries, weak or corrupt national governments often can't or won't regulate them. The results can be disastrous. Human rights impacts associated with business include exploitative labor conditions, abuses by security forces, and community destruction. A pesticide factory explosion in Bhopal, India killed tens of thousands, contaminated the area, and devastated the local community. In Nigeria, an oil pipeline in Rukpokwu in Rivers State burst, devastating the once fertile land around it. The resulting oil spill destroyed farmlands, fish ponds and water wells, and deprived farming families of vital income. In both cases, victims suffered violations of their right to life and health. Without appropriate compensation, clean-up, or criminal prosecutions, victims suffered violations of their right to redress, to livelihood and to an adequate standard of living. Both of these examples demonstrate what can happen when companies and countries don't protect the rights of people affected by a business operation.

On the other hand, US companies that are scrupulous have to compete with companies that don't uphold the same values, so the UN Norms for Business would help create a level playing field. All companies around the world need clear guidance on what is and is not acceptable.

Norms Under Attack

Since the UN Sub-Commission unanimously adopted the UN Norms, they have been subjected to intensive and concerted attacks largely based on false or misleading information by industry bodies such as the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), International Organization of Employers (IOE), and the US Council for International Business (USCIB).

The principle argument in opposition to the UN Norms is that governments, not corporations, are responsible for the enforcement of human rights obligations. Instead of holding business accountable, industry groups say that efforts should only be directed to ensure that states develop and adequately enforce domestic human rights standards.

This approach ignores the tremendous influence and power that corporations exercise in the global economy. In many countries, governments are either unwilling or unable to step in when corporate activities have a negative impact on the human rights of their workforce or the communities where they operate. The business community cannot continue to ignore the fact that corporations, like individuals, can be the subjects of international law. In the words of Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan, "[C]ompanies cannot escape responsibility or be silent witnesses to widespread human rights violations. Human rights are not a luxury for good times – they must be respected and upheld at all times under all circumstances, by all actors, state or corporate."

[Used with permission of Amnesty International: *UN Norms for Business – Taking Corporate Responsibility for Human Rights to the Next Level!*

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/business-and-human-rights/legal-accountability/un-norms-for-business/page.do?id=1101637>

0 The UN Norms for Business specify

- A the obligations of business under the new human rights legislation. ☐
- B the areas in which the UN Sub-Commission will make more recommendations. ☐
- C how to start a new business based on ethical principles. ☐
- D how companies should follow the current human rights legislation. ☒

Q1 The main purpose of the Norms is to

- A ensure the environment is protected. ☐
- B make sure that business is conducted in accordance with the law. ☐
- C eliminate corruption in the business world. ☐
- D reduce the range of responsibilities companies should undertake. ☐

Q2 Following the accidents at Bhopal and in Nigeria

- A people's human rights were adversely affected in several areas. ☐
- B workers were able to claim severance pay from the companies. ☐
- C the public and private sectors decided to improve safety standards. ☐
- D the courts issued orders for payments to be made to those affected. ☐

Q3 The UN Norms, if accepted by all companies, would

- A give priority to some companies. ☐
- B impose fines on those who used unfair tactics. ☐
- C ensure that all companies would be treated the same. ☐
- D stipulate that factories were built on safe and stable sites. ☐

Q4 Criticism of the Norms

- A was accurately documented by industry. ☐
- B was planned by governments. ☐
- C came from business sources. ☐
- D failed to take account of the evidence given by the Sub-Commission. ☐

Q5 The opponents of the Norms claim that human rights obligations should

- A be upheld by governments alone. ☐
- B be maintained by industry groups and government alike. ☐
- C meet standards set out by business. ☐
- D be the responsibility of industry groups. ☐

Q6 According to Amnesty International's statement, human rights are

- A to be reported when abused. ☐
- B of minimal concern to business. ☐
- C easier to respect in prosperous countries. ☐
- D to be supported by all parties. ☐