

**WELCOME REMARKS BY MR JOSEPH WHITTAL, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF CHRAJ, AT THE FORMAL OPENING OF THE WORKSHOP ON THE UN GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS ( CSOs ) ON JULY 7<sup>TH</sup> 2014 AT CENTRAL HOTEL ACCRA**

Distinguished Guests from Civil Society

Respected Resource Persons from Shift and SOMO

Special Invited Guests

Our friends from the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you on behalf of the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) to the first in the series of three workshops on the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights ( UNGPs) which the Commission is jointly organizing with Shift and SOMO ( both international NGOS) with the objective of introducing the UNGPs as a framework for advancing the protection and respect for human rights in Ghana by the State and its Institutions as well as by Businesses.

In June 2011, in an unprecedented step, the United Nations Human Rights Council unanimously endorsed a set of Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The Guiding Principles establish an authoritative global standard on the respective roles of businesses and governments in helping to ensure that companies respect human rights in their operations and through their business relations

These Principles actually are an elaboration on **the UN “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework**

The three pillars of the framework are:

- The State duty to protect against human rights abuses by third parties, including business, through appropriate policies, regulation and adjudication
- The corporate responsibility to respect human rights, that is to act with due diligence to avoid infringing on the rights of others and address adverse impacts with which they are involved; and
- The need for greater access by victims to effective remedy, both judicial and non-judicial

Shift is an independent, non-profit center for human rights and business practice. Their main objective as I am made to understand is to help governments, businesses and their stakeholders put the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights into practice. A fairly new NGO, it was established in July 2011, following the unanimous endorsement of the Guiding Principles by the UN Human Rights Council. The Shift Team under the Chairmanship of Prof John Ruggie, present Chair of the Board of Shift but previously the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Business and Human Rights certainly has the best international credentials to deliver the goods.

Working jointly with SOMO another international not for profit research and network organization working on social, ecological and economic issues related to sustainable development with special

interest in investigating multinational corporations and the consequences of their activities for people and the environment around the world, the Commission is quite confident that we have harnessed the best international teams to assist Civil Society Organizations in Ghana to better appreciate the UNGPs and the impacts of business on human rights and to be equipped with the practical tools afforded by this framework.

The Commission is interested in ensuring that deliberations on all businesses with potential negative impacts on human rights are included in the consideration of Civil Society Organizations in this workshop: Thus, businesses ranging from the extractive industries, such as mining, oil and gas, those businesses under the chamber of Commerce; telecommunications; manufacturing; Services such as transport, hospitality etc should rightly engage the attention of participants

In addition to businesses, Civil society agents need to be armed with the practical tools under the UNGPs for advocacy in ensuring that State Regulatory agents such as the environmental Protection Agency; the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC); the Minerals Commission; Fisheries Commission; Forestry Commission and all state agencies apply the UNGPs and human rights due diligence in their work.

Ghana was the third country to be visited by the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights since its recent establishment. Its Country Report on Ghana has been submitted to the UN Human Rights Council. The Working Group did an extensive coverage of business and human rights issues of particular concern to Ghana and it is hoped that their report and its recommendations should form the basis for a baseline assessment of the situation of business and human rights and inform the basis for a healthy and constructive debate by civil society, businesses and the State Institutions under the three pillar framework of protect, respect and remedy under the UNGPs.

The evidence of negative business impacts abound in Ghana. Whether we are looking at galamsey or illegal gold mining by small scale artisanal miners and the devastation of the forest cover and pollution of the rivers that are the source of drinking water for a lot of the population; or the big conglomerates or multinational corporations who have mainstreamed these Guiding Principles into their laws and operations in the metropolitan capitals where they have their head offices and yet disregard with impunity to implement these in their operations in countries such as Ghana; the health implications on the human rights of many people by dumping of substandard goods and drugs etc and the inability of state institutions with oversight to check these practices; the poor labor practices by businesses which impact negatively on the human rights of workers etc the list could go on ad in finitum.

The other two workshops would target businesses and government or state institutions separately. It is the Commission's expectation that these workshops held back to back of each other would assist in the better understanding of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights by all parties and thus contribute to the advancement of human rights, especially economic, social and cultural rights in Ghana.

On behalf of the Commission and its partners, let me express our most sincere appreciation to the to the people of Norway and Denmark for providing funding support for this important project

Thank you all very much for coming. I wish you very successful deliberations