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# Voluntary Initiatives – A Soft Law for Protecting Human Rights in The Supply-Chains

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## Abstract

After World War II came to an end., global trade and investment gradually increased, creating a strong development of multinational corporations. Through foreign direct investment activities and international mergers and acquisitions, multinational corporations are able to access natural resources and labor worldwide, thereby forming trade liberalization and investment and facilitating the emergence of the supply-chains. The development of the supply-chains have been studied by many scholars. From a narrow perspective, a supply-chain is definite by some scientists as a systematic manufacturing process that turns raw materials into finished goods and delivers them to clients [3], or a general description of process integration involving organizations to change raw resources into completed commodities and transfer them to the end-user. Thinking that the supply chain is not just a mere production process, many other scientists have introduced the concept with a broader view, specifically, a Supply Chain as the combined and coordinated flows of goods from origin to the last destination [37,p.17-28], or makers, suppliers, distributors, retailers, and transportation, information, and logistics management service providers that sell items to consumers. A Supply Chain includes both the external and internal associates for the corporate [7], or life cycle procedures including physical commodities, information, and financial flows to satisfy end customer needs with goods and services from varied, connected sources [2], which may include activities such as research and development (R&D), design, manufacturing, marketing, distribution, and end-consumer support [17]. "The cross-border coordination of the activities required to generate goods or services and bring them to consumers through inputs and various phases of development, production and delivery," according to the 2016 International Labor Conference (ILC) report. This concept includes foreign direct investment by multinational firms in wholly-owned subsidiaries or joint ventures where they directly manage the employment relationship [22].

## 1. General Overview of Voluntary Initiatives – A Soft Law for Protecting Human Rights in The Supply-Chains

### 1.1. The Concept of a Supply-Chain

After World War II came to an end., global trade and investment gradually increased, creating a strong development of multinational corporations. Through foreign direct investment activities and international mergers and acquisitions, multinational corporations are able to access natural resources and labor worldwide, thereby forming trade liberalization and investment and facilitating the emergence of the supply-chains. The development of the supply-chains have been studied by many scholars. From a narrow perspective, a supply-chain is definite by some scientists as a systematic manufacturing process that turns raw materials into finished goods and delivers them to clients [3], or a general description of process integration involving organizations to change raw resources into completed commodities and transfer them to the end-user. Thinking that the supply chain is not just a mere production process, many other scientists have introduced the concept with a broader view, specifically, a Supply Chain as the combined and coordinated flows of goods from origin to the last destination [37,p.17-28], or makers, suppliers, distributors, retailers, and transportation, information, and logistics management service providers that sell items to consumers. A Supply Chain includes both the external and internal associates for the corporate [7], or life cycle procedures including physical commodities, information, and financial flows to satisfy end customer needs with goods and services from varied, connected sources [2], which may include activities such as research and development (R&D), design,

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manufacturing, marketing, distribution, and end-consumer support [17]. "The cross-border coordination of the activities required to generate goods or services and bring them to consumers through inputs and various phases of development, production and delivery," according to the 2016 International Labor Conference (ILC) report. This concept includes foreign direct investment by multinational firms in wholly-owned subsidiaries or joint ventures where they directly manage the employment relationship [22].

Although there is heterogeneity in approach to the supply-chains among scientists and international organizations over the past two decades, the author agrees with the definition of the supply-chains given by the ILC.

## **1.2. The concept and characteristics of voluntary initiatives – A soft law for protecting human rights in the supply-chains**

Prior to the advent of the state and the law, there has been a voluntary commitment to conduct among the people since ancient times. In the history of human development, these behavioral commitments continue to exist and develop in social life because the efficiency and quality of work are completed successfully and satisfactorily due to those spontaneous commitments. Since Lord McNair<sup>2</sup> – the first one used the term "soft law" during the transition stage of normative development [20, p.2], along with the controversy for a long time [34, p.358], voluntary initiatives to protect human rights began to emerge. The world economy with rapid developing has created more multinational corporations, established the supply-chains and made the countries increasingly dependent on each other, but also clearly revealed the differences in legal rules and business ethics, leading to differences in the treatment of purchasing enterprises towards suppliers. That pushes international organizations to develop voluntary initiatives to set out appropriate rules and standards of conduct in line with global trade developments.

Accordingly, enterprises with appropriate rules of conduct for parties, depending on their ability and commitment to implement without any binding sanctions, are increasingly non-state entities, including organizations of the UN system, multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which then together form a new international normative order, and are referred to by scholars as international "soft law". Traditionally, academics have thought about international rules and their legal jurisdiction in terms of legal rules. Soft law, on the other hand, is thought of as a kind of social spectacle, and it is very different from this [44, p.420].

Since Howard Bowen introduced the definition of corporate social responsibility (CSR), many scholars have agreed on the view that CSR initiatives have key issues such as "voluntary", "self-regulatory processes/regulations", "ethical behavior". Letnar Sernič considers it an ongoing commitment of business to basic human rights, ensuring the rule of law, environmental protection, moral acting, and improving the quality of life for workers, local communities, and civilization as a whole. Many scientific research and definitions of soft law have been published, but Francis Snyder's (College of Europe) is largely acknowledged by experts: soft law is in principle a guideline of conduct that has no legal, but practical effect. Linda Senden (University of Utrecht) made this idea even better. Non-legally binding rules of conduct are known as "soft laws". These standards have an impact on other areas, even if they are not legally binding themselves [36].

*With the above analysis, voluntary initiatives to protect human rights in the global supply chain are understood as voluntary codes of conduct built on the foundation of widely recognized international standards. Although they are not legally binding, the organization commits to voluntarily and continuously implement to protect fundamental human rights in its production and business activities, including research and development activities (R&D), design, manufacturing, marketing, distribution, and end-consumer support.*

From the above concept, some basic characteristics of voluntary initiatives to protect human rights in the supply-chains can be seen as follows:

*First, they are designed on the basis of international standards on human rights protection promulgated by international organizations and widely recognized around the world, namely the United Nations' international conventions on political, civil, pecuniary, cultural and social rights, International Labor Organization ("ILO") agreements and declarations, ("UNGP"), and ("OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises").*

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*Second*, They are voluntary codes of conduct implemented by the participating parties. Any country, organization, or business organization that wants to implement this initiative comes from a voluntary implementation, which is fully aware of the content that the enterprise wants to comply with. Companies willing to comply with these criteria must voluntarily register with the company to do so.

*Third*, in principle, There is no bar if either party fails to act as per the original promise. Being aware of its commitment, due to its voluntary nature, it will not be subject to the sanctions of any other party or state if a party does not fulfill its initial commitment. Of course, sanctions here should be understood as direct or legal sanctions, so they should not be imposed on any of the parties voluntarily committed to their implementation. But that doesn't mean teams that haven't committed to implementation won't face consequences. Committed groups are often directed toward one or more specific goals when they volunteer, and when they do not follow through on their initial commitment, the goals may not be achieved.

*Fourth*, Participants aim to make a practical impact on human rights protection. Due to voluntary implementation and awareness of what needs to be done, the results are very clear for participants, such as community certification for business to comply with the law, protect the rights of workers working for this enterprise, work The atmosphere of the business in particular and the living environment in general, thus created by that business. Demonstrates "green" reputation for products.

*Fifth*, the scope of human rights protecting applied in the supply-chain during the production process is understood not only the production and business activities of the organization, but also activities of the suppliers, subcontractors of that organization perform some stages to create products. This is one of the main goals of international organizations when developing initiatives, which is to make impacts on human rights protection that is implemented not only in one organization but also throughout the product making process.

### **1.3. Meanings Of Voluntary Initiatives – A Soft Law for Protecting Human Rights in The Supply-Chains**

In the globalized trade, many purchasing business sources products from many suppliers in countries around the world. And because purchasing in many countries, the local legal rules, along with the complex and diverse culture and business ethics have led to differences in treatment of the purchasing business with its suppliers. Therefore, adopting international initiatives in order to create a common foundation for a harmonized code of conduct and improving working conditions in supplier enterprises in various countries on a voluntary basis with an important role for the human rights protecting and tends to develop more widely in the world economy. The application of voluntary initiatives for the human rights protecting in the supply-chains are meaningful to the organization as follows:

*Firstly*, in the long term, the application of voluntary initiatives for the human rights protecting in the supply-chains will help enterprises increase labor productivity, increase competitiveness, and reduce risks in production and business, and at the same time enhance the brand and corporate value with partners on business ethics...[39, p.2]

*Secondly*, the application of voluntary initiatives for the human rights protecting in the supply-chains is a precise demonstration of the business's commitment to promoting the international labor standards, not only for purchasing business but also for businesses supplying and processing goods in the supply-chains, ensuring legitimate rights of employee, a safe, equal, and non-discriminatory working environment, not use of forced labor and child labor.

*Thirdly*, satisfying the requirements of purchasing enterprises about the application of voluntary initiatives for the human rights protecting in the supply-chains. During the last 10 years, more and more multinational corporations in the fields of retail, consumption, etc. have launched policies to seriously enforce and comply with the CSR standards; and require their suppliers, including small and medium enterprises, to implement and ensure that their production and business processes are consistent with the standards of voluntary initiatives for the human rights protecting in the supply-chains [19, p.2].

## **2. Basic Contents of Voluntary Initiatives – A Soft Law for Protecting Human Rights in The Supply-Chains**

Driven by international actors, these initiatives have become an important strategy for global governance. In addition, with the specialization of the negotiating parties and the facilitation of multilateral cooperation, initiatives are taken at a global level in specific areas such as environmental law, human rights law, labor law, international economic, etc. ... or international initiatives such as the UN Global Compact and UNGP, the OECD's strategy for multinational companies, or amfora's BSCI, International Standards Organization (ISO) standards such as ISO 26000,...

Voluntary efforts to protect human rights in supply chains are not limited to the international level. They can be used at a more local level if the parties agree to include the terms of the contract as terms of the contract. For example, in the United Kingdom, this country has issued the UK Corporate Governance Code; CSR is also considered a strategic policy of the UK Government, CSR is considered a voluntary commitment that is encouraged for every business; and promoting co-operation with local councils, employee and consumer representative bodies. or in Austria, the CSR Initiative was established in late 2002 to raise awareness of CSR and promote dialogue between the business community and government agencies; Also, the government has chosen 18th May as the National CSR Day.

Enterprises can also adopt voluntary supply-chain human rights initiatives. Many large companies have "codes of conduct" to govern internal operations and supply-chain partners. Codes of conduct are often constructed on general grounds such as a dedication to strengthening international labor standards, protecting workers' legal rights, a safe and equal working environment without discrimination, the use of forced labor, child labor, anti-corruption.

While voluntary initiatives to protect human rights in the supply chain are available at various levels, they are based on international agreements on the protection of human rights, which you can see below..

### **2.2.1. Protecting Human Rights in The Supply-Chains Through Workers' Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining**

Part XIII (Labor) of the Treaty of Versailles and the Preamble to the ILO Charter indicated that freedom of connotation was a familiar concept. The ILO Charter identifies freedom of association as one of the tools to improve working conditions and ensure harmonization [4], which is essential for sustainable progress [32, p.4]. When it comes to international law, the right to freely form groups is seen as a very important one. People in a country can see how well they treat human rights by how freely they can join together [27, p.58].

People around the world can join (or not join) labour unions as they see fit. The United Nations signed the UDHR, which includes many sections about associational freedom, like this one: When the U.S. Constitution was written, Article 20 said that everyone has a "peaceful right to meet and form groups." To have freedom of association also gives you the right to peaceful assembly and social security, as well as the right to work and earn the same amount of money for the same job. This includes "the right for everyone to form and join unions in order to protect their own interests." There are both active and passive rights to be part of a group. The UDHR makes clear that both are protected.

The ICCPR states that persons have the freedom to create and join unions. Here, people can do this, which is not what the UDHR says. You can find some rules about how people can work together in the International CCPR. Restrictions that must be set up by law in order to be effective must be important in a self-ruling society, because they protect the health or morals of people in general, as well as their rights and freedoms. It can be seen that the defense of freedom of association in the ICCPR is elaborated in more detail than in the UDHR.

Many people in the ICESCR pay a lot of attention when it comes to the right of free association. Trade unions get a lot of attention. This is important. A trade union can be formed by anyone, as long as the rules of that society allow it. It doesn't matter what your job is, what your gender is, what your race is, where you live, what your political beliefs are or how old you are when you join a trade union. These things don't matter [33].

And trade unions are allowed to operate freely, and to establish national unions. Unions have the right to make their own rules for setting up their charters and managing members. They can choose their own legislators, set up their own operations, and write their own agendas. And competent public authorities must avoid any meddling that would limit or obstruct the lawful workout of this right.

ILO recognises that you have a right to freedom of association, as you can see from this list of factors. Of these, the right to organise and collectively bargain is protected by two conventions: one from 1948, which deals with freedom of association, and the other from 1949, which deals with organising rights (No. 98). Children, forced labour, and discrimination may be effectively eliminated in any culture where workers' unions and organisations are present freely and independently. Freedom of association has long been considered a "basic principle" [51, p.90].

### **2.2.2. Protecting Human Rights in The Supply-Chains Through Non-Discrimination and Fair Pay**

The free and full enjoyment by all individuals of the right to equal treatment is defined as "the starting point of all other rights and freedoms" [38, p.247]. Since its founding in 1919, one of the fundamental goals of the ILO is to encourage equality of occasion and treatment. The Preface to the ILO Charter recognizes the "principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value". The ILO indorses that member states "apply the principle of equal treatment to all workers residing in their territories and waive exceptions which may constitute discrimination against labor" [28, p.679]. The UN Charter also affirms the striving for the understanding of human rights for all "without distinction of race, sex, language or religion".

The right to be free from discrimination, both direct and indirect, was supposed to indicate that everyone should be treated the same when they went to acquire service or worked.. Understanding this is the most critical part of the International Human Rights Code. Regardless of their race or colour, sex or religion, where they originate from, their history or social rank, or their income, everyone has the same rights and freedoms. This is correct, as it is in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Human rights treaties such as the ICCPR state that no one can be judged on the basis of their ethnicity or national origin, language, religion or political beliefs or affiliations, or any combination of these. Some people will be exempt from the application of these guidelines. At the ICESCR, states pledged that men and women will have the same political, economic, social, and cultural freedoms. Workers, both men and women, should have the same chance to be promoted to a better job, only depending on how long they've worked and how good they are at their job.

The right to equality of chance and action in service and profession can be seriously infringed when female workers are sexually harassed in the workplace. The term "sexual harassment" dates back to the 1970s and has since become a recognized worldwide phenomenon in all cultural and professional contexts [45, p.548]. Sexual harassment is an obvious form of judgment on the base of sex, an expression of unequal supremacy relatives between men and women. Sexual harassment is prejudiced when a woman has good estates to believe that her hostility will be detrimental to herself in terms of employment, including recruitment and promotion. Eliminating and criminalizing sexual harassment in the workplace will ensure the rights of female workers, as well as provide harmless and fit working circumstances as recognized by ISESCR in Article 7.b.

The right to equality of opportunity and conduct in service and profession is also the right to equal and fair remuneration and salaries for work of equal value. Clause 2, All people should get paid for the same work, and Article 23 says that everyone should get a fair wage. This means that the salary should be based on the job's characteristics, not how much each person makes. Specifically, Article 7.a(i) of the ISESCR is detailed with a broader concept and is slightly different from the UDHR. According to this, workers should be paid fairly for their work and not be discriminated against. Women, in particular, should be given the same working conditions as men, with the same pay for the same work. The text from the ICESCR says that pay rates should not be set based on gender.

The ILO has issued a number of related Conventions: the Wage Protection Convention, 1949 (No. 95); Employment and Occupational Judgment Convention, 1958 (No. 111); Convention on Equal Payment between Men and Women for Work of Equal Value, 1951 (No. 100).

### **2.2.3. Protecting Human Rights in The Supply-Chains Through Reasonable Working Time**

Looking at the history of labor movement around the world, right from the beginning of the industrial revolution, many campaigns have been carried out to demand reasonable working time along with the right to rest and recreation for workers, which are guaranteed through paid holidays and limits on hours worked in a day. The labor movement in the nineteenth century attempted to advocate for the claim of an eight-hour workday. Denial of the right to rest and recreation by employers from employers has long-term and serious effects on workers' health and productivity. In other words, the right to rest and recreation is essential to maintaining human dignity.

The members who drafted the UDHR understood this. People who work have one of the few rights that they have to take time off and relax. No one can force workers to work unreasonably long hours and workers have the right to a paid holiday. In the context of the ICESCR, the right to rest and recreation was once again affirmed in Article 7(d). Accordingly, in addition to recognizing everyone's right to fair and promising circumstances of work, ICESCR also requires Member States to specifically ensure respite, freedom, rational limitation of employed hours, regular paid holidays as well as payment for public breaks.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) has signed numerous accords stating how many hours a worker can work each day and week. Furthermore, the ILO issued Recommendation No. 116 on reducing working hours in 1962, which suggested that Member States should mature and tool a national policy to encourage the adoption of the principle of reducing working hours. With regard to weekly and annual leave, the ILO has adopted a number of Conventions, notably the Holidays with Pay Convention, 1970 (no. 132). Accordingly, employees are entitled to annual leave with pay with the minimum number of days off per year not less than three working weeks.

#### **2.2.4. Protecting Human Rights in The Supply-Chains Through Ensuring Occupational Health and Safety**

From the early years of the industrial revolution in England, the right to safe and hygienic employed circumstances began to emerge when the British Parliament passed the Health and Morals of Apprentice Act 1802 [14], which requires the plant to have adequate windows and ventilation holes and be cleaned at least twice a year with lime and water, including ceilings and walls. Although the Act was not effective, it was seen as the beginning of hygiene and safety legislation, marking the time when the State began to realize its responsibilities towards workers. Along with the expansion of society, human rights are respected and protected, and the right to safe and hygienic working conditions is also increasingly promoted in the International Human Rights Code and other international legal documents [1, p.29].

According to former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, ensuring occupational health and safety for workers is not only an economic policy but also a fundamental human right. In fact, Mr. Kofi Annan restated the statement of the right to safe and hygienic employed circumstances as recognized in the UDHR and ICESCR.

As stated in United Nations Declaration of Human Rights Article 23, everyone is entitled to employment, freedom of choice and fair and acceptable working circumstances. In order to fully realize this right, Article 12 of ICESCR requires Member States to take the essential actions to “improve in all aspects of environmental and industrial hygiene” as well as “prevent, treat and control occupational diseases”. Necessary measures herein are understood to be legislative, managerial and other actions aimed at ensuring the right to safe and hygienic working conditions and their implementation in practice.

Ensuring harmless and clean employed circumstances is one of the main objectives of the ILO and is enshrined in its Charter “to protect workers against diseases, occupational diseases and accidents, protect children, young people and women” and “appropriately protect the life and health of workers”. With that goal in mind, the ILO has adopted many conventions related to working conditions, including the Agreement on Work-related Safety, Health and the Working Environment, 1981 (No. 155). This Agreement requires that, in Member States, the right to safe and hygienic working circumstances be exercised in operations at the national and establishment level, after discussion with the greatest demonstrative governments of managers and workers to achieve the goal of preventing occupational accidents and health injuries arising from work, by reducing to a minimum as far as realistic, the causes of risk characteristic in the work situation. Periodically, the work-related security and health situation and the working situation must be reviewed in its entirety or for certain areas, in order to detect major existing problems, find effective solutions to those problems, prioritize actions to take, and evaluate results.

#### **2.2.5. Protecting Human Rights in The Supply-Chains Through the Principle of Not Using Forced Labor, Child Labor**

One of the first human rights recognised by global law is the right to be free from compelled labour [15], stemming from the struggles for human rights of mankind demanding the abolition of slavery since ancient times. In the world,

regulations banning slaves existed long before the formation of the UN, such as when the British government signed a Bilateral Treaty to close the slave trade system on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean in mid-1820 [48, p.248]. Slavery and forced labour should be abolished from international law, according to the United Nations General Assembly, noting in Article 4 “No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; All forms of slavery and the slave trade are prohibited.” On this basis, provisions on anti-forced labor and slavery are strongly developed in many other international legal documents.

The ICCPR has concretized Article 4 of the UDHR, reaffirming in Clause 1, Article 8 and develop further provisions on involuntary or required labor in Paragraph 3(a), Article 8 “No one shall be required to be forced to work or forced labor” except for the performance of forced labor pursuant to a judgment of a court of competent jurisdiction, for military service, in the event of an spare or threat of usual tragedy, or any other work that falls under the ordinary civil service. In accordance with ICESCR, all children and young people have the right to be free from any form of forced labour. To this end, ICESCR requires the legislation of its Member States to prohibit and punish the employment of children and young people in jobs that are damaging to their mental, physical health or life-threatening, or harmful to their standard expansion; as well as the need to set age limits to be allowed to hire child labor.

The ILO has also ratified a number of Conventions to protect workers’ right to be free from forced labor: Forced or Required Labor Convention, 1930 (No. 29), Convention on the Elimination of Forced Labor, 1957 (No. 105). These two Conventions are closely related and complement each other with the goal of abolition of forced labor, requiring States Members to commit to abolishing the use of involuntary or required labor of any kind, in the shortest possible time. Convention No. 138 establishes minimum age levels for employment, including the basic minimum age, the minimum age applicable to hazardous work, the minimum age applicable to light work, and is expressed in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Minimum working age level established under Convention No. 138**

Working age level	Min. age applies to all countries	Min. age exception, for developing countries
Basic min. age (Article 2)	Not less than 15 yrs	Not less than 14 yrs
Min. age for hazardous work (Article 3)	Not less than 18 yrs	Not less than 16 yrs , but safety and dignity must be guaranteed
Min. age applies to light work (The 7th rule)		13 - 15 years old

## **2.2.6. Protecting Human Rights in The Supply-Chains Through the Principle of Not Providing Temporary Work, Ensuring the Right to Social Security**

Workers' rights are protected by not hiring them for short-term jobs, businesses must use written contracts that meet legal standards when hiring temporary workers. Workers’ rights, responsibilities and working conditions, including working hours, wages and payment terms, must be clearly communicated to workers before commencing work. This means that employees can participate and enjoy the right to communal safety.

Before the industrial revolution in Europe, the right to social security was almost non-existent in most countries around the world because of the financial crisis and lack of resources in society. Only since the beginning of the industrial revolution has the concept of social security been taken seriously for the understanding of the right to social security [30]. Germany was the first nation in the world to pass a law in 1883 on sickness insurance for the working class. The Industrial Revolution promoted social security development programs aimed at protecting the working class. It was during the social security movement's infancy in the early decades of the twentieth century that the global landscape of social security changed forever. Along with the industrial revolution, many countries experienced a rapid change from agrarian to urban society, the industrialized life characterized by workers with precarious wages, especially for the elderly, the disabled and orphans, showing the necessity and importance of the right to social safety.

Social security, which is essential for a person's well-being and dignity, is a universal right recognised by the United Nations. This right is found in the UDHR, ISESCR, and many other international conventions. Accordingly, if

someone loses their job, gets sick, can't work, gets married, dies, or is in a difficult situation that is out of their control, they should be able to get insurance.

Consider the right to Social Security. It involves both the right to receive and the right to maintain benefit, both monetary and in-kind. (a) Inability to earn an income from work due to illness, disability, pregnancy, work accident, unemployment, or the loss of a family member; (b) Incapability to pay for medical services; and (c) Inability to sustain the family, particularly dependent children and adults. The social security system is required to address nine distinct areas on this basis: (i) Health care; (ii) Sick leave; (iii) Advanced age; (iv) Unemployment; (v) Workplace disaster; (vi) Family support; (vii) Maternity; (viii) Disabled; and (ix) Death.

The ILO has adopted many Conventions regulating the field of social security such as the Convention on Lowest Wages, 1928 (No. 102); Convention on Equality of Treatment in Matters of Social Security for Indigenous Peoples and Non-Natives, 1962 (No. 118); Agreement on Employment Injury Benefits Recommendation, 1964 (No. 121); Convention on Maintenance of Social Security Rights, 1982 (No. 157).

### **2.2.7. Protecting Human Rights in The Supply-Chains Through Ethical Business Conduct**

The perception of business ethics in business has only happened for the past three decades. Norman Bowie – a famous business ethics investigator – is the first one who presented this notion at the Scientific Meeting in 1974 [52]. In the era of globalization, businesses operate in the background of both cooperation and competition with each other. The competition between enterprises is recognized by scholars as a competition of business culture, in which ethical business behavior is a core factor. Ethical business behavior is the conduct of business subjects towards compliance with and governed by legal standards and social ethical standards in their daily activities. Business and ethics are always at odds: Business owners always want high profits, but consumers want to buy goods at low prices; workers always want high wages, but business owners often cut costs; The community has a need to reduce environmental pollution, but business owners want to minimize investment costs for environmental protection activities. Therefore, the conduct of ethical business behavior requires business entities to comply with the law and to calculate the balance of interests between businesses - employees - the community.

Protecting human rights in the supply-chains through ethical business conduct is that a business entity respects the dignity and fundamental labor rights of its employees; competes in a fair manner with competitors; at the same time, attaches importance to efficiency and business purposes associated with corporate social responsibility.

## **3. Achievements and Challenges of Voluntary Initiatives – A Soft Law for Protecting Human Rights in Today's Supply-Chains**

Increasing the use of voluntary initiatives to defend human rights in supply-chains has numerous advantages, including the following: flexibility in participation, interaction and coordination in problem-solving between parties, whereby the parties find the way to maximize the common value in their agreements; ability to self-regulation and promote the partners to change behaviors through compliance and continuous and efficient improvement of social responsibility of the suppliers, ultimately improving the working circumstances in workshops in the supply-chains; At the same time, is useful for the development, interpretation and clarification of international law [16][53] and is likely to become customary law or to be included in an international treaty under certain circumstances [6, p.192].

As a result, some international organisations have issued declarations or action plans in favour of human rights protection in supply chains. To accomplish this goal, the G7 reaffirms its commitment to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and encourages businesses to ensure human rights compliance throughout their supply chains [10, p.5]. Countries, businesses, and labour groups at the International Labor Conference in 2016 were asked to respect and promote human rights and important freedoms in their global supply chains in accordance with the United Nations Guiding Principles and the laws of each country where they work [11]. The EU recognized at its June 2016 conference that commercial admiration for human rights and their integration into commercial processes, value chains, and supply networks are critical for sustainable development and attaining the SDGs. The OECD, the EU, and the US took the lead in promulgating recommendations to compel enterprises to protect human rights in mineral supply chains through standards for responsible investment and the prohibition of economic activities that violate human rights. Other sectors such as agriculture, apparel, and footwear are being developed by OECD and EU institutions.



Rendering to the OECD Guidelines, the accountability of businesses to protect human rights not only at their place of production or business, but also extends to the entire global supply-chains, including transporting, producing, and refining and selling products to consumers. The number of people who came to the biennial Forum on Responsible Mineral Supply Chains has gone up from less than 300 in 2011 to more than 1,200 this time around. All in all, the OECD Guidelines have had a big impact on the development of regulations that protect human rights in the supply chains over the last decade [41, p.28-29]. Contributions to the defense of human rights in the supply-chains cannot fail to mention the sets of standards issued by international organizations, such as BSCI, SA8000, ISO26000-2013. Those standards set out values, principles and codes of conduct that apply to businesses throughout the supply-chains; thereby helping purchasing businesses drive compliance and continuously improve the performance of their suppliers' social responsibility, ultimately improving employed circumstances in factories in their supply-chains. Therefore, many sets of standards have been highly appreciated and applied by associations, corporations, importers, consumer goods manufacturers and retailers around the world. Currently, according to the statistics of Amfori [59], there are 2,496 businesses and organizations that have achieved BSCI standards in the world, including retail groups, importers and multinational companies and many businesses operating in many other production and business industries.

It is also becoming clear that large businesses and multinational corporations have a responsibility to use voluntary initiatives to protect human rights in their supply chains. For example, the Nestlé Vietnam company has signed a pledge to support women's empowerment policies with UN Women and the UN Global Compact. Through efforts to empower women in the workplace as well as promote gender equality through the business value chain, where women have always played an important role, Nestlé has been recognized as Asia's leading HR magazine for 2018, HR Asia, awarded Asia's Best Workplace. In this world. of Vietnam; It is one of the active participants in the United Nations Global Compact and was recognized as one of the top 10 sustainable enterprises in manufacturing at the 2018 event announcing 100 Sustainable Enterprises in Vietnam by the Business Council for Sustainable Development of Vietnam. As recognized. - VBCSD under Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry - Organized by VCCI [65].

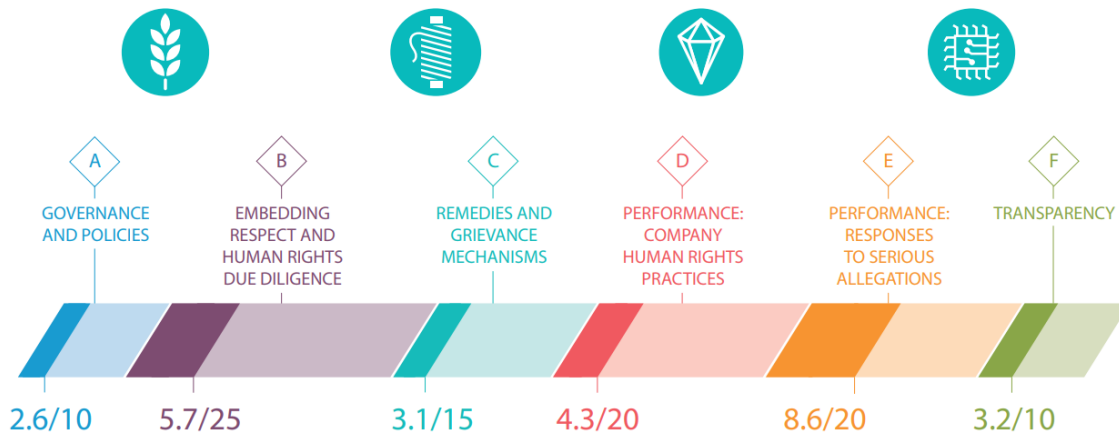
It is difficult, however, to put voluntary efforts to defend human rights across the supply chain into practise. It is estimated that about 21 million individuals around the world work in compelled labour, according to data from the International Labor Organization (ILO) [25]; about 168 million child laborers, with 85 million children working in hazardous work [24]; more than 2.3 million persons expire each year from work misfortunes or occupational diseases, with 317 million coincidences at work [21]; Vulnerable groups of workers in society who do not enjoy basic labor rights, or suffer from discernment, sexual harassment and other forms of strength in the workplace [23]. These figures can be even higher in the supply-chain practices. Voluntary efforts to protect human rights in supply chains face a number of problems, including the following:

*Firstly*, the challenge comes from the awareness and commitment to serious implementation of businesses during the process of applying voluntary initiatives to protect human rights in their supply-chains.

UN Working Group on Human Rights and Transnational Corporations determined that the majority of corporations assessed do not demonstrate practises that are consistent with the Guiding Principles, according to a report published in 2012. Employee and community safety risks may not be appropriately handled, despite growing understanding and commitment. Human rights risks are often overlooked in current reporting, which could be due to poor communication or a lack of awareness and management of these risks.

The assessment report is based on criteria of commitment to respect human rights, accountability, implanting admiration for human rights in corporation organization systems, complaints mechanism and system transparency. There aren't enough companies using UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, according to a report from the Corporate Human Rights Benchmark. This is shown by a low rating for 200 of the world's largest companies in four high-risk sectors: agriculture products, apparel and extractive industries (24 percent ). People who work for the government and people who deposit money should be on the lookout. One-quarter of businesses make less than 10%, and more than half of them don't meet any of the five basic standards for human rights due diligence, which are important for businesses to do.

**Figure 1: Average Score by Measurement Theme  
(Darker color blocks indicate proportion achieved)**



Sources: the World Benchmarking Alliance, 2019

Furthermore, the impact of purchasing companies on their supply chain suppliers' human rights protection is insignificant. They say the current supply chain isn't strong because only the biggest and most powerful companies in the chain do human rights due diligence, which isn't enough to make the chain strong enough for everyone. People attempt to exit Tier One only after the findings of the investigation have been made public by the media or non-governmental organisations. A few corporations appear to be requesting that their tier-one suppliers demonstrate that they, as well as their lower-tier suppliers, are upholding their promise to protect human rights. This shows that they and their lower-tier suppliers are not going to break their promise.

Secondly, voluntary efforts to protect human rights are a big problem because they aren't yet linked to the law in the host countries where they are being used.

Voluntary implementation always brings the best results because the implementer understands his own needs and does not need to have supervision or enforcement sanctions. Practice shows that very few businesses choose to protect workers' rights in their supply chains on their own. Therefore, voluntary initiatives are often designed in a way that combines charitable and compulsory tools.

States should consider a combination of national and international, required and voluntary measures to assist enterprises in treating individuals with respect for their rights. A report from the Shift Project says that governments didn't pay much attention to mandatory measures in the early years of the UN Global Partnership's work, even though this was a big reason why they did. In Europe, at least, this is starting to change, but it's still a long way off. Mandatory transactions could be used to get businesses to follow human rights rules. This idea is getting more and more attention from countries.

Additionally, according to the Corporate Human Rights Benchmark's 2019 report, among 200 global firms, companies like Adidas, Unilever, and Marks & Spencer should be commended for getting off to a strong start and continuing to improve. However, certain well-known brands such as Ross Stores, Monster, Starbucks, and Costco continue to be in the lowermost bands. It is evident that a substantial chunk has not "participated in the race," since their scores have remained stagnant with little score fluctuations. It is important to note that these companies and their supply-chain suppliers conduct an annual ethical audit. This study shows that the "Check-list" approach to an ethical audit isn't very good at finding violations of rules and standards of conduct. This demonstrates how the ineffectiveness of training employees about their working environment and conditions has a significant influence on those responsible for human rights protection in supply chains.

These findings propose that the defense of human rights in the supply-chains should not depend so much on voluntary initiatives, but rather require a combination of a top-down method through that Governments are instructing (not just heartening) corporations to workout due assiduousness, and some countries are adopting hard laws to regulate corporate behavior. This is part of a broader shift away from soft law toward hard law in the commercial and human rights arenas [5].

#### 4. Recommendations and Conclusion

As evidenced by the author's ideas below, protecting human rights in supply chains is a difficult issue.

*Firstly*, to improve the concept, content and monitoring mechanism, and promote accountability in voluntary creativities to discourse human rights protection challenges in the supply-chains. At the similar period, it is necessary to study and progress evaluation and appraisal methods, along with meaningful and profound measurement indicators of the level of implementation and deference for human rights in business actions. Additionally, it's crucial that corporations demonstrate to the public how they're ensuring human rights in their supply chains, as well. By issuing reports on UNGPs compliance, for example, corporations can demonstrate to the public how they are preserving human rights in their supply chains.

*Secondly*, to actively promote the awareness of governments, businesses, representative organizations of workers and employees about the benefits of applying voluntary initiatives to protect human rights in the supply-chains. Accordingly, international organizations coordinate with governments to carry out propaganda campaigns to encourage the defense of human rights in the supply-chains by calling on all businesses, from big to small and micro, to realize their commitment, and call on investors, stock exchanges and other actors with the power to influence cognitive change to play their role. At the same time, social dialogue is also an important information channel that should be taken care of and placed at the center wherever workers' rights are concerned.

*Thirdly*, to mobilize multinational corporations and large-scale enterprises to change the way they do business in the supply-chains. Accordingly, in order to effectively influence suppliers in protecting human rights, the business model needs to orient to long-term and stable partnerships instead of entering into short-term contracts with many suppliers. It takes time, human and financial resources along with an understanding of the standards and expectations of the purchasing business for suppliers to change their practices, so it is important to have close cooperation, and form long-term and sustainable business relationships.

Reality shows that no one can deny the role of voluntary initiatives to defend human rights in the current supply-chains. However, in instruction to further recover the defense of human rights, businesses need to seriously recognize and evaluate auditing and accountability activities in their supply-chains, and need to combine with other requests from the government through the application of national legal documents./.

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