

# The New Africa

ARAB-AFRICAN HUMAN RIGHT EDITION

MAGAZINE



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**Businesses  
Must Place  
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Profit - Prof.  
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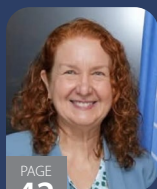
INTERMINISTERIAL DELEGATE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS,  
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## Publisher's Note

### Beyond Profit: Centering People and Rights in Africa-Arab Economies

**T**his Arab-African Human Rights Edition captures a defining moment — a moment where leaders from across two continents came together not just to discuss human rights, but to embed them at the core of economic transformation.

The Arab-African Regional Conference on Business and Human Rights, held in Marrakech, was more than an event — it was a shared declaration that growth without dignity is no longer acceptable. With over 200 participants — from UN officials to business leaders, civil society actors to state institutions — this gathering signaled a new regional momentum for rights-based development.

At the heart of this shift is Morocco's Interministerial Delegate for Human Rights, Mohammed El Habib Belkouch, who reminds us that enterprises must evolve: "They must become engines of rights — not just profit." His message, echoed by many, calls on both governments and corporations to build models that protect people as much as they produce value.

This edition offers more than insight — it is a blueprint for the future of Arab-African cooperation: one where justice, sustainability, and human dignity lead the way.

DR. GIFT CHIDIMMA  
**NNAMOKO ORAIRU**  
PUBLISHER, THE NEW AFRICA MAGAZINE



### Human Rights Are Good Business

**T**his edition documents a critical shift: the recognition that economies grounded in rights are stronger, more inclusive, and more sustainable.

The Arab-African Conference on Business and Human Rights, hosted in Marrakech, brought together voices from across the region to challenge outdated models of development. From the UN to national human rights institutions, the message was clear — we must move from conversation to codified responsibility.

Morocco's Interministerial Delegate for Human Rights, Mohammed El Habib Belkouch, set the tone with a powerful reminder: enterprises must be accountable not just for profit, but for people. Contributions from experts like Prof. Damilola Olawuyi, Dr. Nabih Kapur, and Aicha Douihi further enriched the dialogue, pointing to real pathways for aligning business practices with the UN Guiding Principles.

This issue isn't just a reflection — it's a roadmap. A call to governments, corporations, and communities to rethink what ethical growth truly looks like.



**Lanem Law Kuma**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



The New **Africa**   
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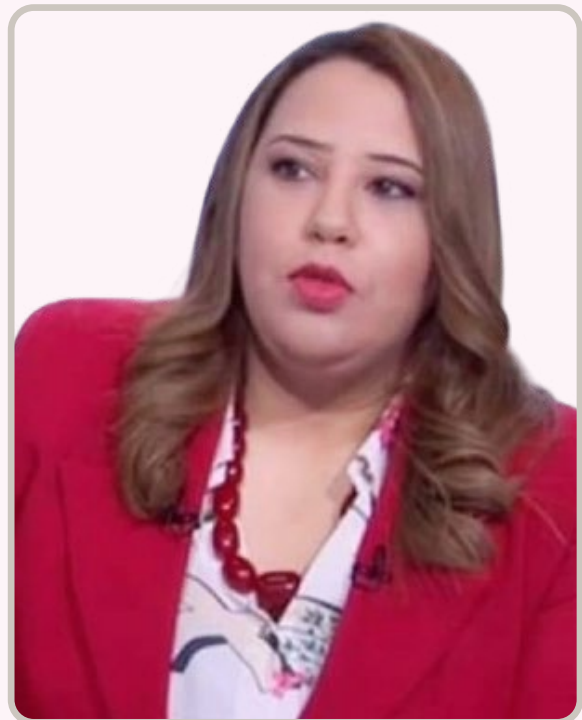
# Turning Dialogue Into Direction: Reclaiming Development Through Rights

**T**he Marrakech conference was not just a convening — it was a course correction. In an age where economic success is often measured in profit alone, this gathering called on Arab and African leaders to redefine development through the lens of justice and inclusion.

The presence of human rights advocates, national officials, and UN agencies reflected a growing consensus: we cannot afford models of growth that sideline environmental standards, labor protections, or social accountability.

Morocco's Interministerial Delegate for Human Rights, Mohammed El Habib Belkouch, offered a firm, visionary framing — one that asks institutions to shift from transactional logic to transformational leadership. Others echoed this urgency: rights must not be peripheral — they must be central to how economies are built and judged.

This edition captures that spirit. It's a platform for those shaping a future where economic development serves humanity — not the other way around.



**KARIMA RHANEM**  
SENIOR MANAGING EDITOR, *THE NEW AFRICA MAGAZINE*



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# The New Africa

## ABOUT US

The New Africa Magazine is a print and digital publication that focuses on the African continent and its people. The magazine covers a wide range of topics such as business, politics, culture, technology, and environment. It aims to challenge stereotypes and promote a more nuanced understanding of Africa. The New Africa Magazine features articles, interviews, and opinion pieces from a diverse range of writers and experts.



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## Arab-African Forum Highlights the Role of Businesses in Advancing Human Rights and Sustainable Development

*By Karima Rhanem, Senior Managing Editor*

The Arab-African Forum on Business and Human Rights opened in Marrakech on Tuesday, drawing over 200 high-level participants from across the Arab and African regions. Government officials, representatives of the private sector, UN agencies, national human rights institutions, civil society, and academic experts gathered to explore how business practices can align with international human rights standards while contributing to inclusive and sustainable development.

Held under the theme “For a Regional Dialogue in Favor of a Responsible Economy that Respects Human Rights,” the two-day forum served as a platform for deepening regional collaboration and promoting best practices that embed human rights into business models and governance.

In his opening remarks, Mohamed El Habib Belkouch, Interministerial Delegate for Human Rights, emphasized that businesses have become spaces where a wide spectrum



of rights—economic, social, cultural, and environmental—are exercised. He called for the development of a national action plan to guide corporate practices toward greater respect for human rights, including impact assessment tools, stakeholder capacity building, and reference frameworks for responsible conduct. Belkouch also pointed to Morocco’s own public institutions as examples of citizen-centered enterprise, underlining the importance of South-South cooperation and regional dialogue.

Younes Sekkouri, Minister of

Economic Inclusion, Small Business, Employment and Skills, highlighted Morocco’s unique model of combining economic development with human rights protection. He noted major reforms such as the institutionalization of social dialogue, a new legal framework for regulating the right to strike, and the expansion of universal health coverage to 22 million citizens. Sekkouri stressed the need to harmonize wealth creation with the protection of all actors along the value chain, reaffirming that Moroccan enterprises are fully engaged in this





inclusive development path.

A legal perspective was provided in a speech delivered on behalf of Justice Minister Abdellatif Ouahbi, who underscored that addressing the challenges faced by enterprises in Arab and African regions requires sustained legislative reform. He called for stronger legal instruments—both nationally and through regional and bilateral agreements—to reinforce corporate social responsibility and human rights protection. He added that economic attractiveness must go hand in hand with safeguarding Labour rights, institutionalizing social dialogue, and ensuring worker participation in decision-making.

Via a recorded message, Amina

Bouayach, President of Morocco's National Human Rights Council (CNDH), emphasized that human rights must be systematically integrated into the legal and governance frameworks of economic systems. She reiterated the role of legal mechanisms in anchoring a rights-based business culture.

In another video address, Carla Haddad Mardini, Director of Private Sector Fundraising and Partnerships at UNICEF, made a compelling call for the mobilization of private sector actors in support of human rights, with a special emphasis on children's rights as a fundamental condition for inclusive and lasting development.

The forum, spearheaded by the Interministerial Delegation for Human

Rights (DIDH) in collaboration with ministerial departments, national institutions, and UN agencies, aimed to build a broader dialogue where human rights are not a constraint but a catalyst for a healthier business climate and sustainable economic progress by 2030.

Panel discussions tackled the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, legal and economic mechanisms for sustainable investment, and the need for coordinated regional efforts to foster accountability, environmental protection, and shared prosperity. The forum closed with a collective call for institutionalizing cooperation platforms and sharing best practices across the Arab-African space.





# Morocco Urges Rights-Driven Investment: 'Corporate Social Responsibility Is a Shared Obligation'

The New Africa Magazine

"The social responsibility of investors is inseparable from that of enterprises, as it is both their condition and their means," affirmed Mr. Habib Belkouch, the Interministerial Delegate for Human Rights of the Kingdom of Morocco, during the opening of the Arab-African Forum on Business and Human Rights held today in Marrakech.

Mr. Belkouch addressed ministers, ambassadors, representatives of national human rights institutions, UN agencies, government bodies, private sector leaders, and civil society organizations, emphasizing that this forum reflects a shared Arab-African commitment to aligning economic development with human dignity and sustainability.

Quoting His Majesty King Mohammed VI's 2005 message to the "Investment Synergies" forum, Mr. Belkouch recalled the Royal vision of an investment culture that merges legitimate profit with equally



legitimate social and environmental responsibility.

He underlined that since the early 2000s, the issue of business and human rights has become central to the international human rights agenda, especially in light of the increasing influence of businesses in shaping Labour conditions, environmental impact, and

equitable development. He cited the 2011 UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights as a landmark framework and referenced ongoing negotiations for a legally binding international treaty in the field.

At the regional level, Mr. Belkouch noted the positive momentum in both Africa and the Arab world, including the





*“The social responsibility of investors is inseparable from that of enterprises, as it is both their condition and their means”*

Mr. Belkouch also praised the positive practices already adopted by Moroccan public institutions and businesses, highlighting examples of corporate citizenship and social responsibility that he encouraged other Arab and African nations to consider and adapt.



In addition to his plenary address, Mr. Belkouch held a series of bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the Forum with senior Arab and African officials. He met with Mr. Sultan bin Hassan Al Jamali, Secretary-General of the Arab Network of National Human Rights Institutions; a delegation from the National Human Rights Committee of the State of Qatar; and Ms. Maryam Abdullah Al-Attiyah, Acting Director of the Human Rights Directorate at Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, responsible for coordination with UN mechanisms. He also conferred with Mr. Mohamed Lemine Ould Dadde, Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mauritania; Mr. Gebeyehu Ayele, High Commissioner for Civil and Political Rights of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia; and a representative of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights. Further discussions took place with Mr. Abdelbasset Ben Hassen, President of the Arab Institute for Human Rights, and Ms. Hannah Forster, President of the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies, based in Banjul, The Gambia. These meetings emphasized the importance of continued cooperation on integrating human rights into economic governance, with several institutions expressing interest in closer collaboration with the Interministerial Delegation and in drawing from Morocco's institutional reforms and experience in multilateral human rights engagement.



African Union's draft policy framework, the 2017 regional parliamentary conference in Morocco, the African Business and Human Rights Forum launched in 2022, and the 2024 Arab Dialogue held in Qatar.

He stressed that these initiatives should converge toward the development of national action plans rooted in human rights principles, encouraging enterprises to conduct due diligence, evaluate the

societal impact of their operations, build institutional capacity, and promote responsible investment strategies.

Forum sessions focus on strategic policy integration, the human rights dimensions of international investment agreements, and urgent issues such as social dialogue, gender equality, the fight against forced and child Labour, territorial and social disparities, and balancing sustainability with competitiveness.





# Human Rights Must Guide Business Practice, Says CNDH President at Arab-African Forum

The New Africa Magazine

**A**mina Bouayach, President of Morocco's National Human Rights Council (CNDH), delivered a forceful message at the Arab-African Forum on Business and Human Rights in Marrakech, calling on governments and corporations to place human dignity and rights at the heart of economic decision-making. Speaking during the opening session of the two-day forum, she asserted that sustainable development cannot exist without respect for fundamental rights, nor can investment be truly enduring if it disregards the dignity of people.

"There can be no development without dignity, and no sustainable investment without respect for human rights," she declared. "These

are not optional principles—they are the foundation of real and lasting prosperity."

Bouayach argued that the link between business and human rights has moved beyond institutional or academic debate to become a strategic pillar for justice, social stability, and human security. She positioned the forum as an opportunity to engage in collective reflection on how to reconcile the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals with the African Union's Agenda 2063. This alignment, she said, must be rooted in rights-based governance and local realities.

The CNDH president also marked the occasion by recalling that this year commemorates the 14th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, as well as the

enduring relevance of the UN Global Compact's ten principles, which encompass human rights, Labour rights, environmental standards, and anti-corruption norms.

However, Bouayach cautioned that the continent's current trajectory is marked by alarming indicators. Environmental degradation is accelerating, forced displacement is rising, and social inequalities are widening. Vulnerable populations are increasingly exposed to these overlapping crises. She pointed in particular to the continued existence of child Labour in Africa, where 72 million children remain engaged in exploitative work—evidence of persistent violations of economic and social rights.

Turning to Morocco's domestic context, Bouayach acknowledged the country's strong economic momentum





but insisted that growth alone is not enough. She called for a clear and urgent adaptation of Moroccan Labour laws and investment regulations to meet international standards for decent work. Large infrastructure projects, she said, must integrate human rights considerations at every stage, from planning to implementation, to ensure they create inclusive and dignified environments free of discrimination and in line with environmental and social norms.

Outlining the strategic direction of the CNDH, she explained that the Council is actively supporting mechanisms—both voluntary and regulatory—that ensure businesses uphold human rights obligations. It is also addressing public complaints related to the environmental and social impact of business activities and contributing to Morocco's World Cup 2030 candidacy by embedding a human rights-based approach into all planning processes. Furthermore, the Council is advancing a national strategy that integrates business practices with rights protections and promoting the same approach within the African Continental Free Trade Area.

**“There can be no development without dignity, and no sustainable investment without respect for human rights. These are not optional principles—they are the foundation of real and lasting prosperity.”**

Bouayach also highlighted CNDH's broader efforts, including the submission of policy observations to United Nations committees, the organization of training workshops that are balanced both regionally and in terms of gender, and the preparation of two national reports examining the implications of artificial intelligence on human rights in the business sector. She underscored the importance of working alongside Parliament and civil society to create a national roadmap for corporate accountability

and inclusive development.

She acknowledged the challenges of implementing human rights due diligence, noting that effective progress in this area requires robust national and regional mechanisms and deeper engagement from civil society and national human rights institutions. Participation from the most affected communities, she emphasized, is essential in shaping fair economic policies.

Bouayach concluded with a broader vision for the Arab and African regions, describing them as rich in both natural resources and human potential. This potential, she argued, must be unlocked through development models rooted in local contexts, centered on rights, and designed to empower small and medium-sized enterprises. Communities themselves must be involved in evaluating the impact of investment and development projects.

“The issue is not only economic,” she said. “It is also social, cultural, environmental, human, and ethical. Human rights are not simply tools for development. They are its very core—and the true wealth of any society.”



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## Dr. Habib Belkouch: “Enterprises Must Be Engines of Rights, Not Just Profit”

**Interview by Karima  
Rhanem, Senior Managing  
Editor**

*In an exclusive conversation with New Africa Magazine, Mohammed El Habib Belkouch, Interministerial Delegate for Human Rights, Morocco, outlines Morocco's vision for human rights-centered economic*

*development. He advocates for businesses to move beyond profit and become agents of social transformation. Highlighting the country's leadership in South-South cooperation, he calls for binding national frameworks, a regional observatory, and responsible investment strategies that prioritize people and the planet across Africa and the Arab world.*

**In your opening speech at the Arab-African Forum, you said companies have become “dynamic spaces” for human rights. How do you see the evolving role of private enterprise in Morocco and Africa in the broader human rights ecosystem?**

Companies are no longer just economic entities seeking profit. They must now





“  
*Enterprises must no longer chase profit alone—they must become engines of inclusive development*  
 ”

serve as fundamental drivers of inclusive development. Their role extends beyond financial performance to include social, environmental, and human rights responsibilities.

In Morocco, we've seen remarkable progress in incorporating human rights into business practices. Moroccan firms are increasingly aligning with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, adjusting internal regulations accordingly. Corporate social responsibility is now viewed not just as a moral imperative, but as a foundation for competitiveness and long-term viability. I expect this trajectory to strengthen, especially as we implement a dedicated national action plan.

Across Africa, the stakes are even higher. In emerging economies hungry

for investment and development, the private sector must be a partner in building fair and equitable societies. Businesses have a duty to respect labor rights, engage with local communities, and tackle environmental challenges. Increasingly, pressure for responsible conduct will come not only from governments but also from consumers, civil society, and investors. Regional partnerships—championed by Morocco within the South-South framework—will be essential for sharing best practices and building a culture of rights-respecting enterprise.

**You referred to a National Action Plan aimed at aligning business conduct with human rights. What should this plan**

**contain, and how can it be implemented across the public and private sectors?**

The plan should be holistic, grounded in the key themes raised during the forum. It begins with aligning national legislation to international human rights standards—particularly in labor rights, environmental protection, and anti-corruption. The second pillar is transparent governance: setting clear mechanisms within businesses to ensure integrity and accountability.

Third, we must embed human rights in major development projects, investment treaties, and supply chains. Implementation requires a multi-stakeholder approach: national institutions, parliaments, the private sector, civil society, and academia must all be involved.

The plan should also prioritize vulnerable groups—guaranteeing fair wages, safe working conditions, social security, consumer protection, and gender-sensitive employment policies. Environmental justice is essential: companies must integrate climate goals into their strategies, adopt sustainable practices, and support green innovation.

Public sector implementation involves a clear legal framework, human rights



clauses in public procurement, and training officials to monitor compliance. Incentives—such as tax benefits or public recognition—can reward exemplary companies. For the private sector, we need internal human rights policies, employee training, impact reporting, whistleblowing mechanisms, and partnerships with civil society. Investments must favor businesses aligned with sustainable, rights-based practices.

**What are the main obstacles to bridging the gap between corporate conduct and international human rights standards in the Arab-African context?**

Several major challenges remain. First is the weakness of legal and institutional frameworks. In some countries, national laws don't align with global norms or lack the enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance. Legal reform and institutional capacity-building must accelerate.

Second, many small and medium-sized enterprises lack awareness of the business case for human rights or see no incentive to adopt them. We need awareness campaigns, fiscal or credit incentives, and platforms for peer learning and best practices.

Third, corruption undermines transparency and accountability—

“  
***A National Action Plan must anchor business conduct in international human rights standards—from labor protections to climate justice***  
”

the bedrock of rights-based business conduct. We must strengthen anti-corruption efforts, empower oversight bodies, and protect whistleblowers.

Other gaps include insufficient monitoring capacity, the challenge of integrating informal labor into formal systems, and protecting vulnerable workers—especially women and children in supply chains. Addressing these issues requires stronger data collection, civil society empowerment, clear indicators, and inclusion strategies for informal workers with full social protection and decent work standards.

**Given Morocco's strong South-South cooperation strategy, how can regional partnerships accelerate the integration of human rights into corporate activities?**

Regional partnerships—especially under South-South cooperation—offer significant opportunities. Countries that have made progress can share experiences in lawmaking and setting up grievance mechanisms. Joint training programs can build shared capacities among governments, businesses, and civil society.

Regional standards, tailored to the local context, could complement international norms. In cross-border investment projects, human rights clauses should be standard, with regional mechanisms for joint accountability. Promoting responsible investment—where success is measured not just economically, but also socially and environmentally—is crucial.

We must also unify positions in international forums to ensure global frameworks reflect our region's priorities and challenges.

**Are Moroccan public enterprises leading by example in social responsibility and rights-based governance? How can their models be adapted or exported?**

Yes, Moroccan public enterprises are setting benchmarks. As state-linked institutions, they are expected to reflect societal values and uphold legal and ethical standards.

They have the resources and mandate to invest in long-term social initiatives—comprehensive social protection, worker training, and environmental programs. Their long history of dialogue with labor unions promotes stability and worker rights.

These models can be exported through regional partnerships and advisory programs. Hosting forums and creating networks of public enterprises will facilitate exchange. However, adaptation is key. Models must reflect each country's unique legal, cultural, and economic context. We must avoid “blind replication” and instead promote flexible frameworks grounded in shared principles.

**Are Moroccan companies taking**





South-South cooperation.

The Marrakech forum produced wide consensus: we need a balanced international legal instrument that respects national sovereignty and supports Global South leadership. There's a clear call for a permanent coordination mechanism—such as a regional observatory based in Morocco, with member state working groups to monitor progress, share knowledge, and advise on regional strategies.

**What message would you like to send to Africa's young entrepreneurs—especially women—about their role in building businesses that support human rights and inclusive development?**

Entrepreneurship in Africa holds immense potential—not just for growth, but for building a fairer future based on justice and dignity. Young entrepreneurs can be architects of this transformation by embedding responsibility and sustainability at the heart of their business models.

They should focus on responsible innovation—creating sustainable value that addresses Africa's social and environmental challenges. Internally, they must champion human rights by ensuring fair wages, decent work conditions, and respectful workplaces.

Entrepreneurs should embrace diversity, support women in leadership, and break down structural barriers. Transparency and anti-corruption must be part of their business culture. Employees are the greatest asset—investing in their growth and well-being yields long-term returns.

Environmental responsibility is essential. From resource efficiency to clean technology, businesses must reduce their carbon footprint while creating opportunities for green innovation.

Finally, entrepreneurs must collaborate. No business should operate in isolation. By connecting with networks, civil society, and governments, they can expand their impact and help shape a more just, inclusive, and sustainable Africa.



**concrete steps to integrate environmental sustainability into their operations?**

Yes, increasingly so. Driven by law, global expectations, and growing public awareness, Moroccan companies are investing in clean energy and sustainable practices. They are legally required to comply with environmental regulations on emissions, waste, and resource management.

Some are embracing the circular economy—recycling waste, reducing resource use, and designing reusable products. Listed companies are now publishing ESG reports, providing greater transparency on their environmental and social impact.

There is growing interest in research and development of eco-friendly technologies. Many firms are making their entire supply chains more environmentally sustainable—from sourcing to distribution. Employees are being educated on eco-conscious

workplace habits. While this progress is uneven across sectors, the overall direction is encouraging.

**One of the forum's key objectives was long-term regional cooperation. Is there momentum for creating a permanent mechanism or observatory for business and human rights? Is Morocco ready to lead such an initiative?**

Yes, absolutely. One of the most important outcomes of the forum was a shared understanding of the need for a lasting regional structure. A dedicated observatory for business and human rights would ensure continued cooperation and monitoring.

Morocco is well-positioned to lead this effort. The fact that the inaugural forum took place here, supported by major UN partners, speaks volumes. Morocco has a solid institutional and legal foundation, a proven track record in social protection, and a clear strategic commitment to



# Morocco Leads with a Forward-Thinking Economic Model Putting Human Rights at the Heart of Growth

The New Africa Magazine

Through its strategic sectoral policies and progressive vision, Morocco has laid the foundation for a development model that integrates sustainable economic growth with the protection of human rights, stated Younes Sekkouri, Minister of Economic Inclusion, Small Business, Employment, and Skills, on Tuesday in Marrakech.

Speaking at the opening of the

Arab-African Forum on Business and Human Rights, held under the theme “For a regional dialogue in favor of a responsible economy that respects human rights”, Sekkouri emphasized: “Thanks to the enlightened vision of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, the Kingdom has made tremendous progress toward establishing a social state.”

The Minister highlighted the implementation of key reforms and initiatives aimed at reinforcing this integrated approach, positioning

Morocco as a regional model of sustainable development. He stressed that the country prioritizes the protection of human rights within all economic and commercial activities.

Among the notable advancements, Sekkouri cited the institutionalization of social dialogue, the adoption of the organic law regulating the right to strike, and the extension of compulsory health insurance to cover 22 million citizens. He also pointed out that comprehensive legal frameworks have been enacted





to protect workers' rights across all sectors.

"Despite the global challenges and ongoing transformations, the balance between job creation, wealth generation, the development of a fair and sustainable economy, and the protection of all stakeholders in the production chain remains a key pillar of our national economic and societal model," Sekkouri asserted, affirming that Moroccan businesses are actively engaged in this mission.

He added that the forum offers a strategic opportunity to showcase Morocco's pioneering experience and exchange best practices with partner countries.

Organized by the Interministerial Delegation for Human Rights (DIDH), in partnership with multiple government departments, national institutions, and UN agencies, the Arab-African Forum on Business



and Human Rights aims to promote regional dialogue, foster experience-sharing, and strengthen human rights standards in business practices, while supporting sustainable development in the Arab-African region.

The forum also seeks to explore avenues for regional cooperation, share best practices, and reflect on lessons learned from the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, fostering greater commitment to sustainable development across the region.

Over 200 participants are attending the two-day forum, including representatives from Arab and African nations, UN and international organizations, public and private enterprises, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations, academic researchers, and subject-matter experts.

Forum panels focus on the national prerequisites and frameworks that contribute to strengthening human rights protections within business operations.



## Businesses Must Place People and Planet Above Profit – Prof. Damilola Olawuyi

By Karima Rhanem,  
Senior Managing Editor

**I**n a landmark conversation during the Arab-African Regional Forum on Business and Human Rights in Marrakech, Professor Damilola Olawuyi, SAN—UNESCO Chair on Environmental Law and Sustainable Development and Member from African States, United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights—delivers a powerful message: Arab and African nations must build resilient economies rooted in dignity, justice, and sustainability. Addressing legal reforms, extractive industry accountability, and the urgent need for homegrown solutions, he outlines a bold regional

path forward anchored in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

**How can Arab and African states strengthen their national legal and policy frameworks to ensure that business enterprises respect human rights in practice?**

It was my great pleasure to participate in this important Arab-Africa Forum on Business and Human Rights, on the theme “Towards a regional dialogue for a responsible economy that respects human rights.” The Forum represents a milestone, a history-making collaboration across Africa and Arab States to advance partnership on human rights and sustainable development. I must therefore start

by congratulating the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco, particularly the Interministerial Delegation for Human Rights (DIDH) and the National Human Rights Council (CNDH), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF, Arab Network for National Human Rights Institutions (ANNHRI), and other co-organizers, for hosting such an innovative Forum.

Given the shared economic priorities and interests of countries in Africa and Arab States, more collaboration, solidarity, mutual supportiveness, partnerships, and common understanding will go a long way to unlock homegrown solutions and an Arab-Africa approach to implementing the UN Guiding





Principles on Business and Human Rights, in a manner that ensures sustained inflow of investments that uplift our societies, without jeopardizing human life and human rights.

The Forum is a good starting point in this regard as it enables countries of the region to promote awareness on this important subject, and to identify how existing legal frameworks can be strengthened to advance responsible business practices in all economic sectors.

**What are the main challenges facing countries in the region when it comes to implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, especially in cross-border commercial activities?**

The key challenges can be categorized into three. First is the need to promote greater awareness on this subject. In my engagements, I notice that while the UNGPs and the business and human rights agenda are gaining momentum in the big cities, especially in big transnational corporations and state-owned enterprises, when you go far to the outskirts and rural communities, knowledge of the UNGPs is often

limited, which is worrisome given that the UNGPs have been around for close to 15 years now. This raises the need for more awareness, workshops, and trainings, especially for small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) and informal sectors, so they can better understand how they can address human rights gaps in their operations and value chains.

Second, and flowing from the first, is the slow development of legislation and national action plans on business and human rights (NAPs) to clarify what responsible businesses should do when operating in the continent. Since 2011 when the UNGPs were endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council, close to 40 countries across the world have responded with legislation, NAPs and instruments that interpret the UNGPs in their own local contexts. However, only four countries (Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria and Liberia) have developed NAPs in Africa and Arab States. It is important for more countries in the region to develop and implement their own legislation and NAPs and to integrate such expectations in their international investment agreements and trade relations. Such regulatory clarity and certainty will reduce ESG risks for investors, thereby making

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*All businesses—  
irrespective of their size,  
revenue, or sector—  
have a responsibility  
to place human rights  
at the heart of their  
investment decisions*  
”

the continent more competitive and attractive as an investment hub.

Third is the need for all stakeholders to bridge artificial silos and work collaboratively to advance the UNGPs. There is no aspect of our lives that is not touched daily by business decisions. Whether we are speaking of the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the climate change emergency; responsible deployment of artificial intelligence and ensuring compliance with international human rights law in times of armed conflicts, businesses are at the heart of these issues. So multistakeholder coordination, collaboration, and partnership, amongst ministries, business

enterprises, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), media and key government agencies in all economic sectors, will be required to identify workable solutions and ensure coherent implementation.

### **In your view, what best practices or innovative approaches were presented during the forum that companies could adopt to better align profit-making with human rights obligations?**

The Forum has greatly highlighted the growing international consensus that all business enterprises have a responsibility to mainstream human rights across their entire operations and value chains and to contribute to sustainable development. As legislation grows in this area, companies that fail to respond could face several risks, including risk of regulatory fines, reputational damage, reduced profit, or even loss of operational or business opportunities. As the Forum has emphasized, businesses should develop human rights policies in line with the UNGPs to guide all their staff, contractors, sub-contractors and other relationships on how to respect human rights in all operations. Second, business should invest more in human rights training and capacity development for their workers and other stakeholders on human rights due diligence to avoid adverse risks in this area. Third is the need for businesses to take always urgent remedial action, which includes ceasing any operations with adverse human rights impacts that they cause, finance or contribute to, with special attention to providing remedies to impacted and vulnerable groups.

### **How can regional economic policies and trade agreements be leveraged to promote greater respect for human rights by business enterprises?**

There have been several positive



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*Businesses as social actors must go beyond compliance to responsibility by using their leverage to promote societal good and sustainable development*  
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developments over the last year in terms of accelerating continental trade and investments across Africa and Arab regions. For example, the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade

Area (AfCFTA) aims to accelerate intra-African trade and global competitiveness of products from the continent. With a population of about 1.3 billion people and a combined GDP of approximately USD 3.4 trillion, the practical implementation of the AfCFTA has the potential to foster industrialisation, job creation, and investment, while at the same time ensuring equitable, inclusive and rights-based trade in the continent. Starting with its preamble, the AfCFTA Agreement expressly recognizes the importance of democracy, human rights, gender equality and the rule of law for the development of international trade and sets a goal of promoting and attaining sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development, gender equality and structural





transformation in the continent.

Aligning the implementation of AfCFTA and other trade agreements with the UNGPs is required to achieve such human rights, rule of law and gender equality objectives. When deciding on the next investments or trade commitments, all parties should undertake human rights due diligence to anticipate and identify likely adverse human rights impacts and then take immediate steps to prevent such adverse impacts when planning, financing and implementing all trade-related processes.

**Are there successful examples of cross-border cooperation between Arab and African states that demonstrate effective integration of human rights standards into business operations?**

In addition to AfCFTA, there is the Arab-Africa Trade Bridges (AATB) Program which aims to accelerate trade and investment flows between African and Arab countries. This partnership includes Nigeria, Morocco and other member states of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and aims to support trade collaboration, finance, and capacity development between Arab and African members of the OIC. The AATB's focus on addressing

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*The Forum represents a milestone, a history-making collaboration across Africa and Arab States to advance partnership on human rights and sustainable development*  
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challenges like climate change and food security could significantly accelerate the human right to clean, healthy and sustainable environment in both regions, and the recent announcement of a US\$1.5 billion Food Security Programme is a positive step in this regard.

Given that this initiative is led by financial institutions, including the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC), Islamic Corporation for Investment and Export Credit (ICIEC), Islamic for the Development of the Private Sector (ICD) and Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA), it shows that businesses can be a force for good. We hope that the

discussions here at the Arab-African Regional Forum on Business and Human Rights can help provide human rights related support for such and other regional initiatives by integrating issues relating to health, safety, environment, just energy transition, women empowerment, and rule of law in such trade processes.

**The forum highlighted the importance of viewing businesses as social actors, not just economic ones. What civic responsibilities do you believe companies should embrace in the context of business and human rights?**

Businesses, especially large transnational corporations, have enormous influence and leverage over their subcontractors and other business relationships. Businesses as social actors can therefore move from just a compliance and profit mindset to a responsibility mindset, which aims to go beyond just complying with the law, to using their leverage to promote societal good and sustainable development. As social actors, companies should use their leverage to prevent, reduce or mitigate any adverse human rights impacts in communities where they operate; invest in capacity-building to ensure that their workers and members of the communities have training in human rights and the capacity to monitor human rights impacts; and also support the work of environmental human rights defenders and demonstrating zero tolerance towards attacks and reprisals against these actors.

A good example is a famous company that recently announced that they will review their relationship with any of their contractors or sub-contractors that does not have a human rights policy or energy efficiency policy in place. This led to several sub-contractors updating their practice in this regard. This is the kind of positive use of leverage as social influencers that we would like to see from more



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*There is no aspect of our lives that is not touched daily by business decisions—from the food we eat to the climate change emergency*

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businesses, including actions relating to contributing their infrastructure to support water, energy, and food security in the communities where they operate. The business and human rights message is about placing people and planet above profit always.

**What role should civil society organizations, national human rights institutions, and academic bodies play in holding businesses accountable and promoting a culture of human rights compliance?**

National human rights institutions (NHRIs), civil society actors, media, and higher education institutions are crucial in the active dissemination of the human rights responsibilities of all businesses under the UNGPs. Awareness and educational programs that focus on the development of sustainable businesses, the

development of environmentally sustainable technologies, ethical financing, access to remedy and the effective dispute resolution are indispensable in promoting an innovation economy that advances the right to clean, healthy and sustainable environment, amongst other human rights.

I would therefore like to see more NHRIs, NGOs, universities and other stakeholders across Africa and Arab States developing tailored workshops, seminars and conference on these important topics, while also that are crucial to promoting trade and investment competitiveness of our countries. The media also have key roles to play as public watchdog and gatekeepers by shining the spotlight on success stories on business and human rights, while highlighting areas for further progress. This is why I must specially commend your magazine for your leadership and interest in the business and human rights topic, and I hope you continue to sustain the discourse.

**Morocco hosted this important forum through its Interministerial Delegation for Human Rights. What is your assessment of Morocco's leadership in promoting the business and human rights agenda regionally?**

I must congratulate the Government of Morocco, especially the Interministerial Delegation for Human Rights (DIDH), for

the foresight and innovation in spearheading this important Forum. You may recall that I was also here in Morocco last year at the invitation of the National Human Rights Council (CNDH) of Morocco for awareness raising on the UNGPs, and to participate in the transitional justice conference held at the Parliament in Rabat.

Given Morocco's position as an economic, technological and digital hub in Africa and Arab States, its leadership and commitment to right-based business practices will surely serve as a positive influence and reference point for other countries in the region. I therefore hope that this Forum is just the beginning of many more positive developments that will go a long way in unlocking the innovation, access, and competitiveness of Arab-African businesses in a right-based global economy.

**How can other countries in the region replicate or adapt Morocco's institutional model to promote inclusive dialogue and effective implementation of business and human rights principles?**

A Forum like this provides an important opportunity for raising awareness and deepening capacity on the UNGPs. With more than 300 participants from West, East, Central and North Africa, including delegations from Gulf countries, this Forum has provided a rich platform for such robust exchange. I hope all the participants will leave here motivated to replicate the multistakeholder approach that we have seen here in Morocco to foster inclusive dialogue that leaves no one behind. You can count on my continued support in this regard.

**As a legal expert in energy and environmental law, how do you evaluate the role of extractive industries in upholding—or violating—human rights in the**





## BUSINESS & HUMAN RIGHTS FORUM 2024

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*Customer preferences are changing across the world in favour of green, ethically sourced and efficient products. Businesses must align with this shift*

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### region? What safeguards are essential in these high-impact sectors?

In 2023, the United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights presented its report, “Extractive Sector, Just Transition and Human Rights,” to the UN General Assembly. The report delves into the collaborative measures that extractive industries can adopt to ensure that their operations, including in the context of the ongoing clean energy transition, not only adheres to human rights mandates but also advances sustainability. I would like to see

more extractive businesses adopt and implement the human rights due diligence steps recommended in that report.

Having taught, practiced and worked on energy and environmental law for close to two decades in Africa, Asia, North America, Europe and the Middle East, I know that to effectively manage and respond to the human rights risks in this industry, more human rights and conflict prevention training will be key. It is also important for businesses and investors in the sector to align their energy transition plans and investment choices with human rights. This alignment involves conducting early and thorough human rights due diligence and impact assessments during the planning, funding, and execution stages of energy transition initiatives, as well as swiftly addressing any negative impacts and risks that may arise. Extractive industries must also implement mitigation strategies and contractual techniques – such as human rights aligned procurement practices, community or impact benefit agreements, transparent and accurate disclosures and reporting, gender equality policies, and other

sustainability safeguards — that are required to ensure a just and inclusive energy transition.

### Could you share any examples from your own work where sustainability-focused business practices have led to measurable improvements in the protection of human rights?

Recent studies demonstrate that sustainable businesses with strong environment, social and governance (ESG) management culture, tend to be more profitable, and I have written extensively on this. For example, over the last years, we have seen the rise of eco—entrepreneurs focused on developing green and sustainable products with reduced carbon footprints that benefit the environment, while creating employment and other economic opportunities. The truth is that customer preferences are changing across the world in favour of green, ethically sourced and efficient products. Businesses in Arab and African States must therefore understand this shift and align their procurements, investment and financing practices with sound ESG standards.





In addition to product change to achieve more efficient and environmentally friendly products, businesses and investors must also invest in process change by developing clear human rights policy to guide their operations, human rights training for staff, having ESG competent boards, and strengthening the use of mediation, arbitration and other ADR mechanisms to enhance access to remedy in case of disputes.

**Can you describe your specific contributions during the Marrakech forum—were you involved in a panel discussion, working group, or policy drafting session?**

It was my pleasure to deliver opening plenary remarks during the high-level session of the Forum, in which I

emphasized the importance of South-South collaboration and regional partnerships to evolve homegrown and localized solutions that advance the UNGPs in all economic sectors. I also shared my experience on how businesses can leverage the momentum to develop win-win solutions and sustainability-focused investments that advance human rights, while creating new economic opportunities on clean technology entrepreneurship and innovation.

It was also my pleasure to speak on a panel on developing National Action Plans on Business and Human Rights, highlighting the need for a multistakeholder process that leaves no one behind. Having the chance to meet and discuss with NHRIs, CSOs, NGOs and business stakeholders in the breakout working sessions was also



very refreshing.

**What is the single most important message you aimed to convey to policymakers and business leaders through your participation in this forum?**

All businesses - irrespective of their size, revenue, or sector – have a responsibility to place human rights at the heart of their investment decisions. Adopting such measures presents a sound business rationale in terms of accessing global markets, minimizing risk, managing reputation, and averting intricate legal challenges. As legislations on human rights due diligence and corporate responsibility emerge across the world, including the EU Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence (CS3D), which aim to restrict goods made from irresponsible and unfair labour conditions from EU supply chains, it is crystal clear that states and businesses in Africa and Arab States that fail to respond risk being left behind in a rapidly changing right-based global economy. I therefore hope that we seize the momentum to grow resilient and right-based businesses that can compete favourably globally.





The International Center for Diplomacy is a Moroccan non-profit organization created on April 2, 2011, with the aim of improving the representation and influence of non-state actors in the continental and international policies of multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, the African Union and the European Commission, and to strengthen cooperation relations with other actors around the world.

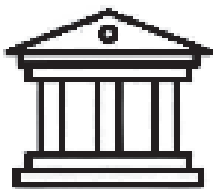
## Our Goals

1. Improve the representation of women and youth in multilateral institutions and international policy dialogues
2. Promote effective diplomatic practices through exchange programs and trainings
3. Promote Morocco's nation branding globally
4. Promoting Morocco's development by contributing to national policy reforms and advocating for reinforcing its international conventional practice related to human rights and development goals

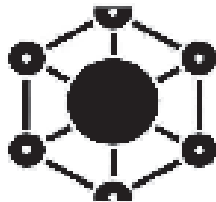
## Theme

1. Gender equality & gender-based violence
2. Human rights
3. UN SDGs and AU 2063 Agenda
4. Women, Youth Peace and Security Agendas
5. Climate Change Resilience
6. Youth & Women's rights
7. Water Diplomacy
8. Global health and Sexual & Reproductive health
9. Girls' rights & Leadership
10. Economic empowerment
11. Comparative policies and legislations

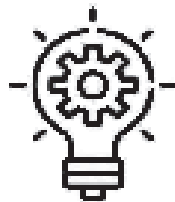
## OUR PROGRAMS



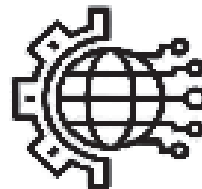
YouLead Africa NextGen  
Academy



Africa Policy Hub



Innovation 4 Change



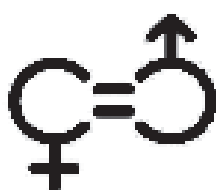
Digital Tech Africa



Climate Resilience



Water Diplomacy



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Diplomacy Talks



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OutSpoken Birds



# UN Leaders Urge Human Rights-Centered Economies at Arab-African Business Forum in Marrakech

## The New Africa Magazine

United Nations officials and government leaders from across the Arab and African regions gathered in Marrakech for the Arab-African Dialogue on Business and Human Rights, calling for stronger alignment between economic development and international human rights standards.

The forum, organized by Morocco's Interministerial Delegation for Human Rights (DIDH) in partnership with several ministries, national institutions, and United Nations agencies, aimed to promote dialogue, share regional experiences, and strengthen

implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). With more than 200 participants—including senior government officials, national human rights institutions, civil society actors, business leaders, and academics—the event marked a significant step toward advancing inclusive, responsible economic practices.

The opening session featured high-level national and international figures. These included Mohammed El Habib Belkouch, Interministerial Delegate for Human Rights; representatives from Morocco's Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Economic Inclusion, Small Business, Employment and Skills; ministers from

Malawi and Mauritania; and officials from the Arab Network of National Human Rights Institutions.

In a recorded message, Abdallah Al Dardari, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States, called on governments, businesses, and civil society to jointly advance economic reforms centered on human dignity.

"Economic development and human rights must go hand in hand," Al Dardari said. "Businesses are also social actors—with the power to advance dignity, rights, and well-being for millions."

He urged accelerated implementation of the UNGPs, and emphasized the need for building stronger partnerships across





sectors to ensure human rights remain at the core of economic decision-making.

Carla Haddad Mardini, Director of Private Fundraising and Partnerships at UNICEF, delivered a video address highlighting the corporate responsibility to protect children's rights in business operations and investments.

Ambassador Omar Zniber, Morocco's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office in Geneva, said in a recorded statement that in a globalized world marked by deepening inequality, governments must enhance economic governance to protect rights. He said this is particularly important in developing countries, where the reconciliation of economic policy with human rights is urgent—especially for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Morocco's National Authority for Probity, Prevention and the Fight Against Corruption also addressed the forum. Its president, Mohamed Benalilou, said the private sector must recognize that profit-making and anti-corruption measures are not opposing goals but complementary pillars of ethical business conduct.



"The commitment to fighting corruption is not an ethical luxury, but a clear and unavoidable legal obligation," he said. "A company that minimizes the impact of its activities on human rights, or that turns a blind eye to abuses in its value chain, directly contributes to increasing inequality, reinforcing injustice, and weakening institutions."

UNDP Resident Representative in Morocco, Ilaria Carnevali, reaffirmed the agency's support to national and regional efforts to promote human rights in business. She said the UNDP sees the private sector as a key actor in driving sustainable development—if it operates with full respect for human rights.

"The private sector can be a powerful





driver of sustainable development—if it fully integrates human rights into its operations,” Carnevali said.

Carnevali emphasized that the ambition of the 2030 Agenda cannot be achieved by international organizations or aid flows alone, and that the SDGs require broad participation—including the business community. She pointed to the UNDP’s Global Business and Human Rights Initiative, supported by the European Union, Japan, Iceland, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, which provides tools and peer learning platforms to help countries develop National Action Plans and support companies in conducting human rights due diligence.

She noted that more than 25 countries in the Arab and African regions have begun their Business and Human Rights journeys, with UNDP supporting many of them. In Morocco, UNDP has partnered with the Interministerial Delegation for

Human Rights to develop and implement the 2018–2022 National Action Plan for Democracy and Human Rights, which includes a dedicated chapter on business and human rights. While a standalone National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights is still under development, Carnevali said the groundwork has been laid.

Morocco, she added, continues to show strong progress in human and economic development, and its preparations to co-host the FIFA 2030 World Cup offer further opportunities to align economic growth with human rights commitments.

“UNDP Morocco stands ready to accompany the next phase—through policy advice, convening diverse stakeholders, and offering technical support for innovative, inclusive programming,” she said.

Marielle Sander, UNFPA Representative in Morocco, commended the forum as a

unique opportunity to place the human being at the heart of the company. She stated that no growth is truly sustainable if it disregards human rights and stressed the role of the private sector in creating working conditions that promote work-life balance and support both men and women.

UNICEF Representative in Morocco, Laura Bill, said that children’s rights and human capital must be at the center of economic strategies. She reaffirmed UNICEF’s readiness to work with Moroccan partners to help businesses implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the Children’s Rights and Business Principles.

“These frameworks not only strengthen social impact but also prepare businesses for growing due diligence requirements, particularly in Europe,” she said.

Bill pointed to three urgent areas of engagement for the private sector: eliminating child labor, supporting youth entrepreneurship, and promoting women’s economic participation. She said that child labor still affects 101,000 Moroccan children aged 7 to 17, and reiterated that every child belongs in school.

“Encouraging young people to build their skills in social entrepreneurship is critical, especially with youth unemployment reaching nearly 32 percent in Morocco,” she added. “Women’s participation in the labor market remains at just 21.5 percent—one of the lowest in the MENA region.”

The forum also included participation from UN Women, the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, and Crédit Agricole du Maroc. Moroccan journalist Khadija IHSANE moderated the sessions.

Organizers said the Arab-African Dialogue provided a strong platform to promote shared responsibility, improve policy coherence, and advance public-private cooperation in building fairer, more inclusive economies. The event closed with a call for concrete national and regional action to align economic growth with universal human rights principles.





## THE INITIATIVE FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF INDIGENT WOMEN AND CHILDREN

### JOIN US IN CHAMPIONING THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENT WOMEN AND CHILDREN!

The ***Initiative for the Empowerment of Indigent Women and Children (IEIWC)*** is a newly registered non-profit and non-political organization dedicated to uplifting the rights, welfare, and empowerment of poor and vulnerable women and children in our communities.

#### WHAT WE DO:

- Advocate for policy changes and legislation that protect the rights of women and children.
- Promote social awareness and interventions to address the challenges faced by indigent women and children.
- Ensure access to quality education, healthcare, legal assistance, and economic opportunities.

#### WHY WE EXIST:

Indigent women and children deserve the opportunity to thrive in a just and inclusive society. We believe that by empowering these vulnerable groups, we can create a brighter future for all.

#### GET INVOLVED:

- **Volunteer:** Join our team and make a difference in the lives of those in need.
- **Donate:** Your contributions help fund programs that support education, healthcare, and legal aid.
- **Spread the Word:** Help us raise awareness about our cause and the challenges faced by indigent women and children.

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# “Water Is Dignity”: Dr. Nabhit Kapur on Rights, Representation, and Africa’s Future

*Dr. Nabhit Kapur, Founder of the Peacefulmind Foundation and a global voice in mental health diplomacy, has been appointed Permanent Observer to the United Nations for the Pan-African Intergovernmental Agency for Water and Sanitation for Africa. With this appointment, he becomes Africa’s official advocate for water and sanitation at the UN, presenting a bold, rights-based vision for access, equity, and partnership. In this exclusive interview, he speaks with The New Africa Magazine about the dignity of water, the role of mental health, and his commitment to amplifying Africa’s voice on the global stage.*

**By Karima Rhanem,  
Senior Managing Editor**

**What does this appointment represent to you, and what could it mean for Africa’s water security?**

This appointment represents a monumental opportunity for me to leverage my expertise in mental health, water, and sanitation to drive meaningful change at the global level. For the African continent, it signifies a chance to amplify the narrative around water security, recognizing

its critical role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Collectively, we can harness this momentum to ensure that water and sanitation are prioritized in national and international agendas, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for millions of Africans.

**Why is access to water and sanitation fundamentally a matter of human dignity?**

Access to water and sanitation is fundamentally about human dignity. In diplomatic discussions, I will

emphasize the human stories behind the statistics, illustrating how lack of access affects people's daily lives, health, and opportunities. By sharing real-life examples and case studies, I aim to create empathy and understanding among stakeholders, ensuring that policy decisions are informed by the needs and experiences of those most affected.

**How do you approach the sensitive dynamics of representing Africa as someone from India?**



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*Access to water and sanitation is fundamentally about human dignity. Water security is the foundation of sustainable development and human well-being*

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As someone from India leading a Pan-African mission, I recognize the importance of representation. To navigate this, I will engage extensively with African stakeholders, listening to their needs, challenges, and aspirations. My focus will be on building strong partnerships and collaborations that are driven by the priorities of African nations. By staying grounded in the realities of the continent and fostering inclusive dialogue, I am confident that we can achieve impactful outcomes that benefit the people of Africa.

**What are your plans to elevate the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSA) at the UN?**

To elevate the WSA's profile and influence at the UN, I plan to engage in strategic advocacy, leveraging my network and expertise to position water and sanitation as critical components of global development agendas. This will involve participating in high-level forums, collaborating with key stakeholders, and producing thought leadership pieces that highlight the urgency of the water crisis in Africa. By amplifying the WSA's voice, we can drive policy changes and mobilize resources to support sustainable water management.

**What role do partnerships play in your**



**strategy?**

Partnerships with agencies like UN-Water, WHO, and UNDP will be pivotal. I envision collaborative programming that aligns with their mandates while addressing the specific needs of African countries. By pooling resources and expertise, we can develop comprehensive solutions that tackle the complexities of water and sanitation challenges. These partnerships will also facilitate knowledge sharing, capacity building, and advocacy efforts, ensuring that our initiatives are grounded in best practices and evidence.

**How do you plan to raise global awareness of Africa's water crisis?**

To ensure Africa's water and sanitation crisis becomes a global priority, we will utilize various tools and platforms. Social media campaigns can raise awareness

and mobilize public support, while high-level political forums provide opportunities for dialogue with decision-makers. Data-driven reports and research will inform policy discussions, and partnerships with civil society organizations will amplify grassroots voices. By employing a multi-faceted approach, we can build a global movement that prioritizes water security for all.

**What is the link between water access and mental health?**

The link between water access, public health, and psychological well-being is profound. Inadequate access to clean water and sanitation can lead to health issues, stress, and anxiety, particularly in vulnerable populations. As someone with a mental health background, I will advocate for integrated solutions that address both physical health and mental well-being, recognizing



that access to water is a foundational element of healthy communities.

#### How has your leadership experience shaped your approach to diplomacy?

My experience leading the Peaceful mind Foundation has equipped me with valuable skills in advocacy, community engagement, and program development. These skills are directly applicable to high-level diplomacy, where understanding the nuances of stakeholder engagement and the importance of empathy can facilitate effective collaboration and negotiation. My background in mental health has also honed my ability to approach complex issues with a holistic perspective, essential for addressing the multifaceted challenges of water and sanitation.

#### Why is mental health relevant to development work in fragile contexts?

Mental health and leadership training are crucial components of the broader development agenda, particularly in fragile states. By investing in mental health, we can enhance resilience, promote social cohesion, and foster effective governance. I envision initiatives that integrate mental health support into water and sanitation programs, ensuring that communities are not only provided with essential services but also equipped to thrive in the face of challenges.

“By sharing real-life examples and case studies, I aim to create empathy and understanding among stakeholders. We can build a global movement that prioritizes water security for all”

#### What are the main challenges to coordinating water policy across African countries?

Coordinating water policy across multiple African nations presents several challenges, including:

- **Diverse Political and Environmental Contexts:** Each country has unique governance structures, environmental conditions, and socio-economic priorities.
- **Limited Capacity and Resources:** Many nations face constraints in terms of financial resources, technical expertise, and institutional capacity.
- **Cultural and Linguistic**

**Differences:** Varied languages, cultures, and traditions can affect stakeholder engagement and policy implementation.

- **Transboundary Water Management:** Rivers and lakes often cross national borders, requiring cooperation and coordination among multiple countries.

To address these challenges, we will:

- **Tailor Our Approach:** Engage with each country to understand its specific needs and develop context-specific solutions.
- **Build Capacity:** Provide training and technical assistance to enhance the skills and knowledge of local stakeholders.
- **Foster Collaboration:** Promote dialogue and cooperation among countries sharing water resources, facilitating knowledge sharing and joint management.
- **Leverage Technology:** Utilize digital tools and platforms to enhance data collection, monitoring, and decision-making.

#### How do you plan to influence global decisions as a permanent observer?

As a permanent observer at the UN, I plan to influence outcomes by:

- **Building Relationships:** Establish strong connections with member states, UN agencies, and other stakeholders to foster collaboration and support.
- **Providing Expertise:** Offer technical expertise and evidence-based recommendations to inform policy discussions and decisions.
- **Advocating for Priorities:** Champion the water and sanitation agenda, ensuring that it remains a priority on the global development agenda.
- **Mobilizing Resources:** Engage with donors, governments, and private sector partners to secure funding and resources for water





least 10 African countries, aligning them with global best practices.

- **Partnerships:** Established strong partnerships with key stakeholders, including governments, UN agencies, and private sector entities.
- **Resource Mobilization:** Secured significant funding and resources to support water and sanitation initiatives in Africa.

#### What are the most urgent long-term water infrastructure needs in Africa?

With Africa's population expected to exceed 2.5 billion by 2050, the most urgent long-term water infrastructure needs include:

- **Sustainable Water Supply Systems:** Developing resilient water supply systems that can meet growing demand while addressing climate change impacts.
- **Wastewater Management:** Investing in wastewater treatment and management infrastructure to protect public health and the environment.
- **Climate-Resilient Infrastructure:** Designing and building water infrastructure that can withstand the impacts of climate change, such as floods and droughts.
- **Innovative Technologies:** Adopting innovative technologies and solutions to enhance water efficiency, conservation, and management.



and sanitation initiatives.

#### How will you position WSA as a go-to partner for water solutions?

To position the WSA as a source of solutions and investment readiness, we will:

- **Develop Innovative Solutions:** Create and promote innovative approaches to water management, sanitation, and hygiene that can be scaled up and replicated.
- **Build Partnerships:** Collaborate with governments, private sector entities, and civil society organizations to co-create solutions and leverage resources.
- **Enhance Investment Readiness:** Develop bankable projects and provide technical

assistance to countries to improve their capacity to attract investment in water and sanitation.

- **Showcase Impact:** Document and share success stories, demonstrating the impact of our initiatives and attracting further support and investment.

#### What concrete outcomes do you hope to achieve during your tenure?

By the end of my mandate, I hope the WSA will have achieved:

- **Increased Access:** Improved access to clean water and sanitation for millions of people across Africa.
- **Policy Influence:** Influenced water and sanitation policies in at

#### What message would you like to send to global decision-makers?

"Water security is the foundation of sustainable development and human well-being. As we look to the future, it is imperative that global decision-makers prioritize water and sanitation in Africa, recognizing its critical role in achieving the SDGs, promoting economic growth, and ensuring peace and stability. Let us work together to secure a water-secure future for all Africans."





## Geneva UN Forum: Morocco pushes for responsible business to boost rights and development

The New Africa Magazine

The Interministerial Delegation for Human Rights and the Permanent Mission of Morocco to the United Nations Office in Geneva organized a high-level meeting on Tuesday, July 1, under the theme: “Responsible Business Conduct: Challenges and Opportunities to Promote Human Rights.” The event took place on the sidelines of the 59th session of the UN Human Rights Council, with the participation of the Moroccan delegation led by Mr. Mohamed Habib Belkouch, Interministerial Delegate for Human Rights.

Participants included Mr. Omar

Zniber, Morocco’s Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva; Mr. Youssef Alaoui, head of the CGEM group in the House of Councillors; Ms. Pernille Fenger, Director of the UNFPA Office in Geneva; and Ms. Olga Nelova, UNDP specialist on Business and Human Rights.

In his address, Mr. Belkouch emphasized that the connection between business and human rights is an emerging and relevant issue due to its close link to development, policy, and economic activities—especially in a rapidly changing world impacting the human rights landscape. He positioned this meeting as a continuation of discussions held at the Arab-African Forum organized

by the Interministerial Delegation in Marrakech on June 24–25, 2025, which gathered over 300 participants from 32 Arab and African countries. The forum included government officials, parliamentarians, national human rights institutions, monitoring mechanisms, international organizations, experts, academics, civil society, and the private sector.

Mr. Belkouch noted that the forum led to important outcomes, particularly in using regional platforms to complement international and regional human rights systems. It aimed to strengthen cooperation and share best practices—insights he shared with attendees at the Geneva meeting. He stressed that



these outcomes will form the basis of collective thinking toward fostering responsible business conduct, balancing human rights respect with economic growth that supports business prosperity.

He added that the Marrakech Forum offered an opportunity to present experiences and address key challenges, particularly implementing international standards while turning commitments into concrete achievements. It also discussed how regional and international dimensions contribute to anchoring the relationship between business and human rights, promoting national stability and development by aligning economic policy with human rights principles.

Furthermore, the discussions extended to the possibility of establishing an international legal framework defining state responsibilities and linking legal and voluntary obligations of businesses. The goal is to strike a balance between investor interests, labor rights, and legal clarity in the workplace.

The forum also highlighted the importance of the UN Guiding Principles and OECD Guidelines as foundational references. A session was dedicated to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a focus on economic, social, and environmental rights tied to corporate activities. Key points included natural resource sustainability, climate change, gender equality, and other SDG-related challenges, alongside ways to enhance the role of businesses in achieving these goals.

Mr. Belkouch also discussed emerging concepts such as social responsibility, solidarity-based approaches, and civic-minded businesses. He emphasized that these ideas require clear strategies and broad mobilization—not just vague slogans. He concluded by underlining the importance of strategic planning and the conditions needed to fulfill corporate commitments in support of human rights.







## Geneva: Morocco Reaffirms Commitment to Strengthening National Human Rights Mechanisms

During the 59th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Morocco reaffirmed its commitment to promoting and protecting human rights through national mechanisms dedicated to implementation, reporting, and follow-up.

Speaking at an international panel organized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Mohamed Habib Belkouch, the Interministerial Delegate for Human Rights, emphasized that these mechanisms form a cornerstone of Morocco's institutional approach to human rights.

Leading a high-level Moroccan delegation, Belkouch underlined that the Kingdom's engagement in these frameworks reflects a clear awareness of the need to reinforce the efficiency and resilience of its human rights system amid growing global challenges. He noted that such discussions contribute to mobilizing collective efforts, encouraging shared engagement, and exchanging good practices—marking a significant step forward in developing these mechanisms.

As coordinator of the executive committee for national mechanisms, Morocco continues to play a key role in fostering international cooperation.

Belkouch called for leveraging the Geneva meeting to reinforce existing momentum, reduce coordination gaps, and develop innovative tools for data collection and information-sharing. He also stressed the importance of institutional coordination and the integration of international human rights obligations into national public policy.

He highlighted the importance of exchanging experiences and good practices as a foundation for institutionalizing these mechanisms. Morocco, he noted, has contributed to preparing the action plan for the global network of national implementation, reporting, and follow-up mechanisms, with a finalized draft completed by the executive committee and scheduled for formal adoption at the third international conference in Lisbon at the end of the year.

Belkouch acknowledged the support of the OHCHR in assisting national mechanisms and coordinating international human rights follow-up efforts. He recalled that Morocco established its Interministerial Delegation for Human Rights in 2011, anticipating the OHCHR's 2012 call for such mechanisms. According to a 2016 OHCHR study, Morocco remains among a limited number of countries

with an independent institutional mechanism in place.

In line with this commitment, Morocco has actively participated in global efforts to strengthen national mechanisms. In December 2022, it hosted the first international conference on these mechanisms in Marrakech, which concluded with the adoption of the “Marrakech Declaration” and a shared vision for their development, including the proposal to establish a global network for cooperation and expert dialogue.

To reinforce this vision, Morocco worked jointly with Paraguay and Portugal to draft a reference framework for international cooperation. This initiative gained momentum during the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in December 2023, and was consolidated in May 2024 at the second international conference in Asunción. That event concluded with the adoption of the “Asunción Declaration,” establishing the international network, which now includes 24 member states. Morocco was unanimously elected as coordinator of its executive committee.

Morocco also hosted the 10th edition of the “Glion Human Rights Dialogue” in Marrakech in October 2024, which concluded with the adoption of the





“Marrakech Guiding Framework,” a reference document outlining best practices and key lessons for building and sustaining the international network of national mechanisms.

Meanwhile, the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Mr. Mohamed El Habib Belkouch, the Interministerial Delegate for Human Rights, reaffirmed Morocco’s commitment to strengthening national mechanisms for implementation, reporting, and follow-up (NMIRFs) and to sharing its institutional expertise on the international stage.

Speaking at a high-level event held on June 30, 2025, and co-organized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Permanent Mission of Portugal, and the Global Rights Group, Mr. Belkouch underlined Morocco’s readiness to act as a bridge between national commitments, institutional experience, and multilateral dynamics, particularly in areas related to gender equality and the protection of vulnerable groups.

He emphasized Morocco’s permanent willingness to actively contribute to enhancing national mechanisms for human rights implementation and follow-up. He also highlighted the importance of solidarity and dialogue among states as a pathway to transforming universal standards into tangible progress that serves human rights, peace, and sustainable development.

Mr. Belkouch recalled the evolution of the Interministerial Delegation for Human Rights, created in 2011, from a coordination body focused on aligning international commitments with national policies and reporting to international mechanisms, into a platform for dialogue and collective reflection on emerging human rights challenges. He noted the delegation’s role in monitoring Morocco’s international obligations, and its active cooperation with UN agencies, particularly UNFPA through a bilateral cooperation program (2023–2027).

He further explained how the delegation contributes to adapting and operationalizing international standards within the national context, facilitating alignment between UN recommendations and sectoral priorities, and fostering multi-stakeholder dialogue to assess the real-world impact of implementation.

In recognition of its efforts, Morocco was unanimously selected to coordinate the International Network of NMIRFs, launched during the Asuncion Conference in May 2024, which currently brings together 24 member states.

Later that same day, during a session focused on national human rights action plans and the integration of international recommendations into public policy, Ms. Fatima Barkan, Secretary General of the Interministerial Delegation for Human Rights, presented Morocco’s experience in integrating human

rights recommendations into national policies.

She announced that Morocco is in the process of preparing a comprehensive national human rights strategy aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of public policies through integrated initiatives, clearly defined priorities, and optimal use of resources to achieve concrete results.

Ms. Barkan emphasized that the strategy will be inclusive, engaging government sectors, civil society, academic institutions, and citizens via digital platforms to ensure broad participation. She noted that it will also take into account emerging challenges, such as technological developments and transnational issues, to ensure a transition aligned with the aspirations of Moroccan society.

She recalled Morocco’s progress under the leadership of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, describing the country’s human rights path as not only a legal obligation but a strategic national priority and a driver of sustainable development. This commitment is reflected in the principles enshrined in the 2011 Constitution and in the adoption of the National Action Plan for Democracy and Human Rights, which aims to promote participatory governance and address systemic gaps.

Ms. Barkan also highlighted the institutional and legislative reforms accompanying this commitment and reiterated that human rights remain a central national priority, backed by unwavering political will and a forward-looking vision for democratic consolidation and human development.

She concluded by detailing the active engagement of the Interministerial Delegation with international human rights mechanisms, including the submission of 56 thematic reports and 4 reports to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), and by noting that Morocco has received approximately 1,300 recommendations, reflecting its dynamic interaction with the UN system and its commitment to tracking and addressing related issues.

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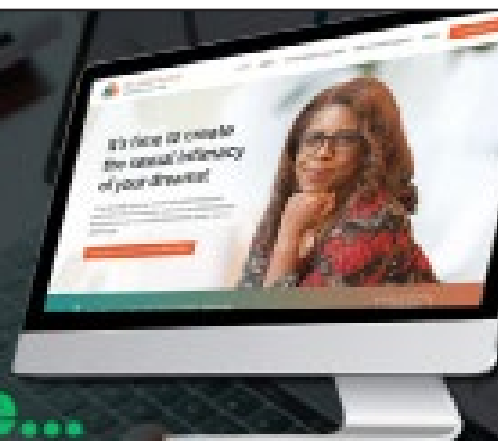
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# Turning Rights into Results: Aicha Duihi's Call for Binding Human Rights Commitments in Arab-African Economies

## The New Africa Magazine

**A**t the Arab-African Forum on Business and Human Rights held in Marrakech on June 24 and 25, 2025, Ms. Aicha Duihi, President of the International Observatory for Peace, Democracy and Human Rights in Geneva, delivered a compelling message to political leaders, institutional actors, and private sector representatives. For her, embedding human rights at the heart of economic governance is not a moral accessory, but an indispensable strategy for achieving sustainable and inclusive competitiveness across the Arab-African region.

Participating in Workshop 7 dedicated to “Good Governance and Transparency,” Ms. Duihi

framed her intervention around the theme “Respect for Human Rights: A Prerequisite for Sustainability and Competitiveness in the Arab-African Region’s Economies.” From the outset, she emphasized that economic growth devoid of rights-based foundations inevitably leads to fragility, inequality, and social exclusion. Her address challenged the conventional view that human rights obligations are incompatible with market dynamics. On the contrary, she argued, human rights act as accelerators of trust, investment resilience, and long-term prosperity.

Ms. Duihi pointed to the mounting contradictions witnessed across the region: a dynamic investment climate often coexists with deepening social disparities, informal labor practices, and institutional shortcomings. In the

absence of regulatory frameworks that ensure justice and equity, she warned, the gap between economic ambition and social reality will only widen, further marginalizing vulnerable populations—especially women and youth.

Central to her message was the urgent need to operationalize the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. These principles, according to Duihi, provide a universally recognized foundation for responsible economic behavior. They define the state’s duty to protect, the corporate responsibility to respect, and the right of affected individuals and communities to effective remedy. She underscored the relevance of moving from theoretical support to institutional implementation through what she described as a “smart mix” of voluntary and





mandatory mechanisms.

Ms. Duihi called for firm commitments to mandatory human rights due diligence in both public procurement and foreign direct investment. She advocated for transparency-enhancing tools such as ethical labeling, the integration of digital technologies to identify and manage risks early, and the establishment of grievance mechanisms that are not only independent but also accessible and centered on affected communities. Equally important, she stressed, is the role of civil society and small and medium enterprises, which must be empowered through targeted capacity-building and a structured presence in economic decision-making spaces.

Addressing territorial inequality, she highlighted that regions such as the Sahel and remote parts of North Africa are not lacking in potential—they are deprived of

equal opportunity and visibility. Fair investment strategies that take into account local realities and prioritize social cohesion, especially through the inclusion of women and youth, represent a key entry point for shared prosperity. She called for regional platforms to exchange best practices and reinforce South-South cooperation as a means to localize global standards without compromising core human rights values.

Ms. Duihi concluded with a resolute message: the time has come to move beyond the language of recommendations. The Arab-African region must shift toward binding commitments, where human rights are not merely referenced in economic policies but serve as benchmarks of performance, credibility, and long-term viability. “Competitiveness that is not rooted in respect for rights,” she declared, “is short-lived, fragile, and ultimately counterproductive.”

“

***Respect for Human Rights: A Prerequisite for Sustainability and Competitiveness in the Arab-African Region's Economies***

”

Her intervention stood out in a panel marked by high-level contributions. Workshop 7 was moderated by Mohamed Ayat, a member of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances. Mr. Rabi El Abid Amrani of Morocco's Ministry of Economy and Finance explored fiscal integrity as a pillar of governance. Mr. Naoufal Ouldelmehdi from Morocco's National Authority for Integrity and Anti-Corruption shared institutional approaches to fighting corruption. Mr. Nizar Touhami Chahdi, policy analyst at the OECD, highlighted global standards for responsible business conduct. Mr. Cheffou Ouma-Lahérou of Niger's Ministry of Justice addressed the challenges of legal enforcement in fragile contexts. Mr. Djétourané Mbaihoundarou Abel from Chad's Prime Minister's Office discussed political will and governance reforms. Finally, Ms. Naima Akouri, Head of Certification at IMANOR, emphasized the role of standardization in reinforcing transparency and business accountability.

Together, the voices of the session reflected a shared understanding that the path toward sustainable and inclusive development in the Arab-African region must be built on the solid ground of human rights, accountability, and cooperative governance. Ms. Aicha Duihi's intervention gave that vision its clearest and most uncompromising expression.





# Justice in the Green Transition: Advocating for Disability Inclusion in Environmental and Territorial Governance

## New Africa Magazine

At the Arabo-African Forum on Business and Human Rights, Panel Three took on the critical theme of “Environment, Habitat and Territorial Justice,” offering a platform for rethinking how human rights and environmental governance must be integrated to build inclusive and equitable societies. The session brought much-needed attention to a group often left out of sustainability dialogues: persons with disabilities.

Moderated by Fatima Barkan, Secretary General of Morocco’s Interministerial Delegation for Human Rights, the session featured speakers from national institutions and international organizations who explored how environmental protection, urban development and

human rights can converge to reduce vulnerability and promote fair access to resources across Morocco’s diverse regions.

Abdelkader Ajir, from the Ministry of Energy Transition and Sustainable Development, presented Morocco’s National Strategy for Sustainable Development. His intervention outlined the framework’s emphasis on good governance, diagnostic tools, prioritization of strategic objectives and participatory implementation. He highlighted how various sectoral laws on air, water, waste and the coastline form part of a national legal architecture, while acknowledging the importance of ensuring synergy among them to strengthen territorial equity and local implementation.

In a pivotal intervention, Dr. Ahmed Ait Brahim, specialist in disability rights and inclusive development,

addressed the intersection of disability and environmental justice. He underscored that persons with disabilities are often the first to be affected by environmental degradation, yet rarely considered in the design of environmental or territorial policies. His presentation emphasized that the rights of disabled individuals must be mainstreamed across all levels of sustainable development planning, from environmental strategy to urban housing.

Dr. Ait Brahim introduced the principle of intersectionality, stressing that disability cannot be treated as a single, homogenous category. He highlighted how different types of disabilities—physical, sensory, cognitive, and psychological—intersect with other factors such as gender, geography and economic status to compound vulnerability.

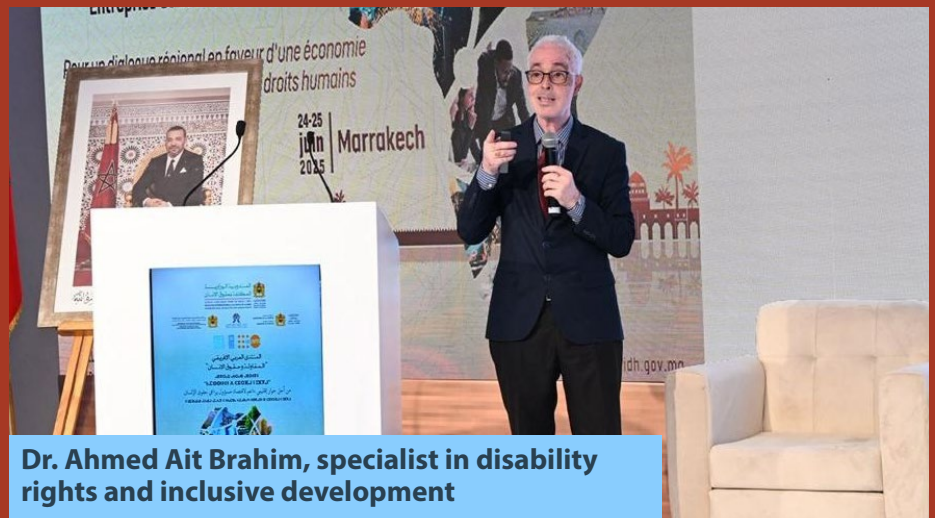




This complexity, he argued, demands tailored and inclusive responses grounded in human rights rather than narrowly defined legal compliance. He called for a cultural and institutional shift toward frameworks that prioritize dignity, equality and participation.

He further argued for the territorialization of rights, noting that disparities in infrastructure, access to public services and environmental exposure create layered disadvantages for people with disabilities in different regions. Without local implementation strategies that address these realities, national goals risk leaving behind the very populations they aim to support.

From the international development perspective, Olga Nilova, Human Rights and Business Specialist at the United Nations Development Programme, reinforced the centrality of participation in environmental governance. She emphasized that sustainable development must be inclusive, and that companies, governments and institutions have a duty to ensure that persons with disabilities are not just consulted, but actively involved in the planning and monitoring of environmental programs.



**Dr. Ahmed Ait Brahim, specialist in disability rights and inclusive development**

The discussion was further enriched by the contribution of Zahouane Chakir, Director General of Al Omrane Marrakech-Safi. He outlined how territorial housing policies are evolving to better reflect the principles of social justice and accessibility, noting that inclusiveness must be embedded in the design phase of public infrastructure rather than treated as an afterthought.

The panel also raised the issue of regulatory protection for citizens and employees who report environmental harm. While legal instruments exist, there remains a need to strengthen safeguards for those who expose

irresponsible practices, particularly when the communities affected include vulnerable or marginalized groups.

Panel Three delivered a clear message: environmental and territorial justice cannot be achieved without disability inclusion. As countries pursue ambitious climate and development goals, the inclusion of persons with disabilities must become a core measure of progress. The green transition is not only a matter of environmental performance—it is a test of societal values, fairness, and human dignity.



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Under the leadership of the esteemed Moroccan magistrate judge Jamila Sedki, the Forum of Dialogue of African Magistrates (FDMA) in partnership with the Moroccan Agency for International Cooperation (AMCI), hosted a significant scientific meeting aimed at African students residing in Morocco. This initiative, which reflects Morocco's growing role in African judicial diplomacy, offered a rare and vital opportunity for exchange, dialogue, and awareness-raising among young African students pursuing their education in the Kingdom.

# Marrakech Forum Highlights Urgent Need for Stronger National Frameworks on Business and Human Rights

## The New Africa Magazine

**A**t the 2025 Regional Forum on Business and Human Rights in the Arab and African Regions, held from June 24 to 26 in Marrakech, Morocco, high-level delegates, human rights experts, and civil society leaders came together to examine how best to integrate international human rights principles into national business practices. The forum was organized by the Interministerial Delegation for Human Rights of the Kingdom of Morocco, in partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights.

One of the forum's focal events was the panel discussion on "National Conditions and Prerequisites for Effective Implementation of the Principles on Business and Human Rights in the Arab-African Region." Held on June 24, the session provided a platform for countries to share their institutional experiences and legal pathways in implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. It placed special emphasis on the need to align national systems with global standards while respecting local specificities.

Victoria de Mello of UNDP Africa moderated the panel, which featured a diverse group of speakers from across the region. Professor Damilola Sunday Olawuyi, a member of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights and UNESCO Chair at Hamad Bin

Khalifa University, opened the dialogue by pointing out that the pace of adopting National Action Plans (NAPs) remains slow in many states. He argued that effective plans must be adapted to each country's institutional capacity and socio-economic context, urging a move from commitment to implementation.

Livio Sarandrea, international adviser with UNDP, reinforced this call by warning against over-reliance on legislation without embedding human rights into business culture and operations. He advocated for a model where legal compliance is matched by proactive engagement and training across sectors.

Representing Morocco, Mohamed Adi—Director of Coordination and Promotion of Human Rights at the Interministerial Delegation—





outlined national efforts to integrate international principles into public policy. He highlighted Morocco's experience in institutional coordination as a model for strengthening accountability mechanisms and legal coherence.

Senegal's Ngane Ndour, Director of Human Rights at the Ministry of

Justice, presented legal reforms aimed at improving labor rights and social inclusion. He noted the importance of inclusive governance, particularly the involvement of affected communities in shaping and monitoring national strategies.

From Ghana, Mary Nartey of the Commission on Human Rights and

Administrative Justice spoke about gender equality as a cornerstone of business and human rights planning. She stressed that reform efforts must address systemic imbalances and include protections for vulnerable groups.

Djibouti's perspective was brought forward by Oumalkheir Attia Weiss of the National Human Rights Commission, who underscored the limitations faced by countries with fewer resources. Her intervention called for regional cooperation and knowledge-sharing as essential tools for capacity-building.

Pwadumdi Okoh, Deputy Legal Director at Nigeria's National Human Rights Commission, focused on the critical need to enhance access to justice. She pointed to the development of judicial pathways and remedies for human rights violations by businesses as a major priority for national institutions.

The panel's exchanges reinforced a shared understanding: that implementing the UN Guiding Principles in the Arab and African regions demands political commitment, robust institutions, and collaborative approaches. As the Marrakech forum unfolded, this session stood out as a call to transform international frameworks into living policies—grounded in local realities and driven by regional solidarity.





# Arab-African Forum: BPW SG Rabia Salhi Highlights Barriers to Women's Economic Inclusion

## The New Africa Magazine

**A**t the Arab-African Forum on Business and Human Rights, held on June 24–25, 2025, in Marrakech, Rabia Salhi, Secretary General of the Moroccan Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Maroc), took part in Workshop 6 on the inclusion of vulnerable groups. Organized by the Interministerial Delegation for Human Rights, the forum provided a regional platform for dialogue around how business actors can contribute to rights-based, inclusive development across Africa and the Arab world.

Representing BPW Maroc President Fatiha Othmane—who was attending the FEMNET continental forum

in Kenya—Rabia Salhi shared key reflections on how economic structures often exclude women, particularly those in vulnerable social and geographic contexts. Her presentation focused on strengthening the role of women entrepreneurs, recognizing unpaid labor, and encouraging inclusive policies that connect economic opportunity with human dignity.

In a statement to The New Africa Magazine, Salhi stressed the importance of removing systemic barriers that hold women back. “It is not enough to say that entrepreneurship empowers women,” she said. “We must dismantle the legal, structural, and cultural obstacles they face. We need to rethink women’s roles—not just as beneficiaries of development, but as its architects.”

Salhi also emphasized the value of unpaid domestic and care work, largely performed by women, which remains unrecognized in formal economic policies despite its essential contribution to society. She argued for a more holistic approach that reflects the full scope of women’s labor—both visible and invisible.

Citing BPW Maroc’s work on the ground, Salhi presented several examples of initiatives aimed at building women’s skills in entrepreneurship, financial literacy, marketing, and cooperative development. These projects, she explained, support women in achieving financial independence and self-determination, particularly in rural areas and under-resourced communities.





Her intervention called for integrated strategies involving public institutions, civil society, and the private sector to promote inclusive economic participation and responsible business practices. She also advocated for embedding gender equality and human rights principles in national education systems as a long-term solution to address inequalities.

Salhi concluded by highlighting BPW Maroc's mission and its work at the national level. The federation, affiliated with the international Business and Professional Women network, supports more than 800 women entrepreneurs and professionals through training, advocacy, and leadership development. With active branches in Rabat, Casablanca, and Salé—and others under way in Marrakech and Meknès—BPW Maroc promotes women's economic participation and access to decision-making spaces.

The federation has organized several national and international events under the High Patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI and the effective presidency of Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Meryem. Its second international forum is currently in preparation and is scheduled to take place in April 2026 in the cities of Marrakech and Laayoune.



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# Rachida Bouzit El Mernissi Reaffirms Morocco's Commitment to Gender Equality as a Strategic Priority

**The New Africa Magazine**

**A**t the Arab-African Forum on Business and Human Rights, held on June 24–25, 2025, in Marrakech and organized by the Interministerial Delegation for Human Rights, Rachida Bouzit El Mernissi, President of the Women Entrepreneurs' Association of Morocco, issued a compelling call to place gender equality at the heart of inclusive economic development. The forum served as a regional platform for dialogue on how business actors can advance rights-based, inclusive development across Africa and the Arab world.

Speaking during a session focused on Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination, Mernissi emphasized

that gender equality is not merely a moral obligation or a corporate responsibility gesture. "It is a strategic necessity rooted in the framework of fundamental human rights and the international commitments that Morocco has ratified," she stated.

She recalled that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims in Article 1 that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights," and cited Morocco's 1993 ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which obliges the state to eliminate discrimination in every sphere, including the economy.

Mernissi also pointed to Morocco's 2011 Constitution, which guarantees equality between men and women

under Article 19. To reinforce this principle, she quoted King Mohammed VI's 2018 speech delivered on Morocco's National Women's Day:

"The Moroccan woman, as a partner in development, must benefit from full and complete recognition of her rights and abilities. The 2011 Constitution enshrined equality between men and women, affirming that women have the right to full citizenship and active participation in all fields. Our commitment is to continue working toward women's empowerment, to strengthen the progress made, eliminate all forms of discrimination, and ensure their full participation in the country's economic, social, and political life."

Despite this legal and institutional progress, Mernissi underlined





persistent disparities in the professional sphere. “Women, in many sectors, still face limited access to leadership positions, significant wage gaps, and implicit stereotypes and discrimination that hinder their full participation,” she said.

She warned that gender inequality is not only a question of justice but also a missed economic opportunity. “It is urgent that Moroccan companies recognize their role in the practical implementation of these equality principles,” she urged. “Promoting gender equality in the workplace is not just an ethical obligation or moral duty; it is a strategic lever for performance and innovation.”

According to Mernissi, gender-diverse teams are more creative, more resilient in times of crisis, and better positioned to meet the demands of a globalized economy. “Diversity drives innovation, supports better problem-solving, and enables a more accurate understanding of diverse client needs,” she noted.

She laid out a comprehensive roadmap for driving change—beginning with data analysis on gender gaps and access to leadership, followed by the creation of clear and ambitious policies, the implementation of practical measures to promote equality, and

finally, a commitment to transparency through regular reporting. “The regular publication of diversity reports, ongoing team awareness, and the celebration of best practices are all tools to deeply embed this culture of equality,” she said.

Mernissi stressed that by aligning equality with corporate strategy, businesses stand to gain in visibility, competitiveness, and talent retention. “By integrating gender and equality into their strategy, Moroccan companies can not only meet their legal obligations, but also derive significant strategic benefits. They can enhance their brand, attract and retain talent, improve economic performance, and contribute to a more balanced and inclusive society.”

She concluded by placing Morocco’s national commitment within the broader global context of the 2030 Agenda. “Implementing these principles also contributes to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 5, which aims to achieve gender equality by 2030.”

#### ***Her final message was unequivocal:***

“Gender equality is not optional. It is a fundamental right enshrined in human rights law and in Morocco’s

international commitments. The leadership of our country, embodied by His Majesty King Mohammed VI, shows that this fight for equality is a national mission.

I invite all of you—economic actors, political leaders, and citizens—to make equality a strategic priority. In doing so, we will build a more just, inclusive Morocco, where every individual, man or woman, can realize their full potential in respect of their rights. Together, let us work toward a future where justice and equality are at the heart of our development.”

Her remarks were part of a broader exchange moderated by Ms. Ranya Kbayli of UN Women Morocco. The session featured contributions from other distinguished speakers, including Mr. Younes Benslimane, Deputy Director of Human Rights at the Ministry of Justice; Mr. Mario Melo, Judge at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights; Ms. Houda Zaouali, Human Rights Officer at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; and Ms. Katia Sorin, UN Women Representative in Morocco. Together, they offered intersecting perspectives on how institutions and enterprises can drive gender equality across the Arab and African regions.



## CIDH Africa Calls for Urgent Action on Sahel-Sahara Trafficking Crisis at UN Hearing

### The New Africa Magazine

The Network of the Independent Commission of Human Rights in North Africa (CIDH Africa) issued a strong warning at the United Nations during the informal interactive multi-stakeholder hearing held as part of the preparatory process for the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the appraisal of the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons. In a detailed and urgent statement, Executive Director Moulay Lahsen Naji described the Sahel and Sahara as the epicenter of a deepening crisis of human trafficking, where armed conflict, organized crime, and state fragility have converged to create ideal conditions for exploitation and abuse.

Naji explained that across vast and often lawless areas, non-state armed groups and terrorist organizations have entrenched themselves, using

trafficking in persons not just for profit but as a tool of control and warfare. He pointed to northern Niger and Mali—particularly gold-mining zones—where trafficking networks operate under the protection of armed actors. In these areas, forced labor and sexual exploitation are widespread, and women and children remain especially at risk, targeted in mines, camps, and transit hubs.

The statement warned of the worsening plight of migrants and refugees who cross the Sahel each year seeking safety or opportunity in North Africa and beyond. For many, these journeys turn into corridors of suffering. Criminal gangs, militias, and even some state actors are involved in kidnapping migrants for ransom, subjecting them to torture, forced labor, and sexual violence. Naji referenced a joint report by UNHCR, IOM, and the Mixed Migration Centre, which confirms that such abuses are now endemic along the land routes to the Mediterranean,

with women and children facing heightened threats of gender-based violence and exploitation.

He also addressed the complicity of armed groups that control key smuggling corridors and extort migrants directly. Their activities are not only destroying individual lives but also dismantling the rule of law, destabilizing entire communities, and pushing fragile states toward collapse.

Despite international commitments under the Palermo Protocol and the UN Global Plan of Action, Naji made clear that protection gaps remain severe. Survivors have little access to justice or support, while humanitarian actors struggle to reach the most affected. The frameworks exist, but their implementation on the ground is lacking.

CIDH Africa called on UN Member States and all stakeholders to go beyond declarations and commit





to the immediate enforcement of existing legal instruments. This includes harmonizing national laws with international standards, ensuring proper enforcement through anti-trafficking units and survivor support, improving cross-border cooperation to dismantle trafficking networks, and guaranteeing access to justice, medical care, and psychosocial support. Equally important is engaging civil society, local communities, and survivors in designing and implementing anti-trafficking strategies.

Moulay Lahsen Naji's leadership at CIDH Africa reflects decades of commitment to human rights defense in the region. He is a member of the Steering Committee of the NGO Forum, Focal Point for Northern Africa, and a member of the support group to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)

Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, promoting the Guidelines on Freedom of Assembly and Association in Africa. He also serves on the Steering Committee of the AU-EU Civil Society Platform.

His published works include "Human Rights in North Africa: Advocacy and Activism" (2019), which examines the practice of advocacy under political pressure, and "Building Strong Alliances with North African Civil Society for Free and Open Civic Space" (2020), which provides a framework for protecting civic freedoms in restrictive environments.

In closing his statement, Naji reminded participants that the Sahel-Sahara trafficking crisis is more than a humanitarian emergency—it is a test of international resolve. "We have the tools, the frameworks, and the knowledge," he said. "What is needed now is action: decisive, coordinated, and grounded in the

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*Despite international commitments under the Palermo Protocol and the UN Global Plan of Action, Naji made clear that protection gaps remain severe. Survivors have little access to justice or support, while humanitarian actors struggle to reach the most affected*

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lived realities of those most affected. Let us honor our commitments by turning legal frameworks into lifesaving realities, and ensure that no person is left to face these horrors alone.”



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# From Geneva: Morocco Prepares for 11th Edition of Glion Human Rights Dialogue

## News Magazine Style Report

In a move that underscores its deepening engagement with global human rights initiatives, Morocco has announced its commitment to actively participate in the preparations for the 11th edition of the Glion Human Rights Dialogue, scheduled to take place in Glion, Switzerland, in October 2025.

Speaking from Geneva on Thursday, July 3, 2025, during the 59th session of the UN Human Rights Council, Mr. Mohamed Habib Belkouch, the Interministerial Delegate for Human Rights, confirmed Morocco's readiness to contribute as a key partner in ensuring the success

of the upcoming edition. The announcement was made during a preparatory meeting co-organized by the Moroccan Interministerial Delegation for Human Rights and Morocco's Permanent Mission to the UN Office in Geneva. The event was held in collaboration with the United Arab Emirates, Global Rights Group, and UN Women.

The Glion Dialogue, held annually, is considered a pivotal international forum for human rights discussions. Mr. Belkouch highlighted the significance of this year's focus on strengthening National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting, and Follow-up (NMIRFs), noting their role in driving meaningful

change, bolstering political commitment, and fostering inclusive oversight structures with tangible implementation plans — all vital elements toward a more effective global human rights governance system.

Morocco's engagement, he stressed, stems from a firm belief in the power of dialogue to transform international commitments into actionable benefits for citizens. He reiterated Morocco's ongoing dedication to closely follow human rights developments and to collaborate with the Human Rights Council and UN agencies in defense of universality and international solidarity on human rights matters.

The preparatory meeting revolved





around the theme: "Key Success Factors – Best National Practices in Implementing Recommendations on Gender Equality and Women's Rights, and International Support." In this context, Mr. Belkouch emphasized the heightened relevance of the topic in 2025, as it marks the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Citing a recent joint report by UN Women and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, he pointed out that many of the goals set in Beijing remain unmet, making this year a critical milestone for reassessment.

Delving into Morocco's national mechanisms, Mr. Belkouch described them as more than bureaucratic tools — they are dynamic drivers of public policy that help systematically integrate UN recommendations into lasting actions. He drew connections between these efforts and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 5 on gender equality.

He also took the opportunity to outline Morocco's notable achievements in promoting women's rights and gender equality, a national priority driven by a series of reforms

initiated under the leadership of King Mohammed VI. These include constitutional amendments enshrining gender parity, the reform of the Family Code, and other progressive measures that position Morocco as a strong advocate for women's rights on the international stage.

It is worth noting that Morocco hosted the 10th edition of the Glion Dialogue in October 2024, which concluded with the adoption of the "Marrakech Guiding Framework." This milestone document marked a turning point in international discourse on NMIRFs, offering a comprehensive reference for countries seeking to build or strengthen these mechanisms. It promotes effective governmental coordination in linking international obligations to national policies — particularly sectoral strategies and national plans — while fostering meaningful dialogue with civil society and national human rights institutions, and ensuring coherence with the SDGs.

As Morocco prepares for another round of strategic engagement at Glion, its message is clear: global dialogue, anchored in concrete national action, is the path forward for real human rights progress





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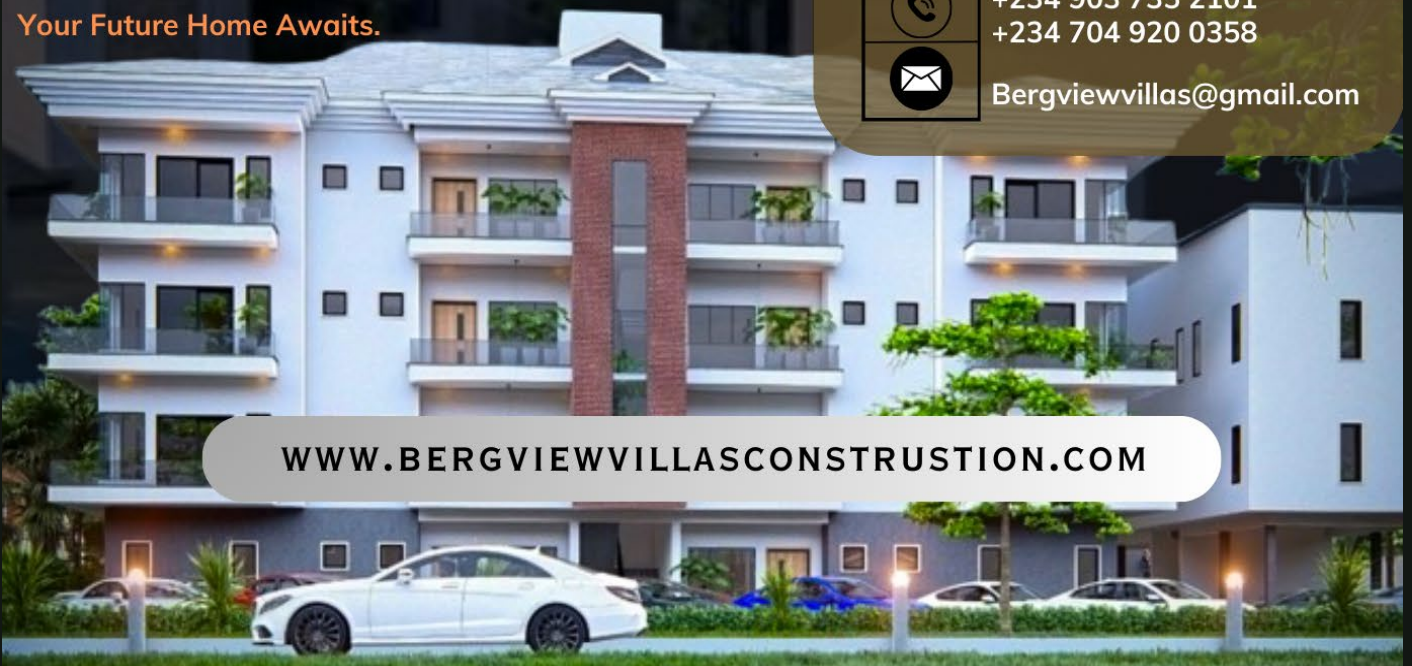
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