



Human Rights

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Background

"We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America share with the Church of Jesus Christ in all times and in all places the calling to be peacemakers" ("For Peace in God's World" [ELCA, 1995], pg. 1 [\[1\]](#)). We are called to promote respect for human rights by teaching, speaking out, and supporting effective ways to monitor and comply with human rights codes. Our church, through our predecessor bodies, has a legacy of peacemaking, and we are called to dedicate ourselves anew to pray and work for peace in God's world. We have consistently supported the work of the United Nations in the area of human rights.

In 1948, the United Nations called for the recognition of the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family by adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [\[2\]](#). This concern includes respect for human rights: "Human rights provide a common universal standard of justice for living with our differences, and they give moral and legal standing to the individual in the international community. We therefore will continue to teach about human rights, protest their violation, advocate their international codification, and support effective ways to monitor and ensure compliance with them." [\[3\]](#)

In June 2011 the UN Human Rights Council endorsed the "Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations 'Protect, Respect and Remedy' Framework" proposed by UN Special Representative John Ruggie [\[4\]](#). The "Ruggie Principles" are organized under the UN Framework's three pillars:

- The **State Duty to Protect** Human Rights
- The **Corporate Responsibility to Respect** Human Rights
- The need for greater **Access to Remedy** for victims of business-related abuse.

ELCA Social Policy

In 1995 the ELCA adopted the social statement "For Peace in God's World," [\[5\]](#) which

calls the church to be a disturbing presence, a reconciling presence, and a deliberating presence to promote respect for human rights. This statement echoes the work of our predecessor church bodies expressed in "Human Rights: Doing Justice in God's World" (LCA, 1978) [7]. The ELCA document also discusses the relationship between economy, justice, and human dignity. "Justice points toward an economy ordered in ways that: respect human dignity; provide the necessities of life; distribute goods and burdens fairly and equitably; and are compatible with a life-sustaining ecosystem. Sustainable growth and fair distribution are vital in creating economic justice. Both should enable all to participate in the economy. Global economic integration should enhance economic well-being among and within nations. Fiscal policy, business practices, investment policies, and personal life styles, including patterns of consumption, should contribute to economic justice and the long-term sustainability of our planet.">

The ELCA's 1999 social statement, 'Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All,' [8] considers the relationship between corporations and politics: "The economic power of large transnational corporations continues to grow, making some of them larger than many national economies. Along with this financial strength comes an inordinate potential to influence political decisions, local and regional economies, and democratic processes in society. The power they wield enhanced through mergers and buyouts, can have positive effects, but it can also hold others captive to transnational corporate interests. The global community must continue to seek effective ways to hold these and other powerful economic actors more accountable for the sake of sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all."

In an effort to seek accountability, the ELCA and other investors have called for the establishment of informal and formal codes of conduct on human rights. Once the codes were created, the ELCA has joined others in teaching about these codes, speaking out about them, and supporting compliance with them.

Corporate Response

In response to the impact of economic globalization, there has been a growth of concern within a number of corporations for the human rights of those who are most vulnerable. While we have been accustomed to governments setting boundaries to prevent human rights abuse, many countries do not provide these safeguards. As noted earlier, corporations are now called to set principles to promote human rights within their own operations, their supply chains and within the societies in which they operate. Many corporations have developed policies that support the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the core conventions of the International Labor Organization (ILO). Corporations have addressed community engagement, safety and healthy working conditions, sustainable wages, and community engagement (especially with regard to indigenous community concerns). Some lay out criteria for selection of and withdrawal from a country of operation, as well as how their work in this area will be verifiable and transparent. These policies go beyond an individual work ethic to encompass the culture and ethic of corporate behavior.

Social Criteria Investment Screens

None currently apply to this paper.

Resolution Guidelines for ELCA

- We support asking a corporation for the development, adoption, review, or implementation of its policies related to human rights for a company and its supply chain.
- We support review of a company's operations in particular locations when our public policy position or partner churches and agencies express concerns about operations. This includes reports on risk assessment and policy on additional responses in areas experiencing civil strife or war.
- We support requests asking a corporation to endorse the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.
- We support requests for reports on policy and the implementation of a corporation's policy with respect to the 'Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations Protect, Respect and Remedy Framework.' This may include international production facilities, international suppliers and commitment to independent monitoring of compliance with the policy.
- We support requests for reports on policy and implementation of a corporation's policy with respect to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [9].
- We support reports outlining policy, procedure and practices for obtaining free, informed and prior consent of Indigenous Peoples affected by corporate activities through their recognized and official governance structure; and policy to avoid contact with Indigenous Peoples living in voluntary isolation.
- We support the adoption of a human rights policy including the prohibition of sexual exploitation of minors including comprehensive, transparent and verifiable sections to address provisions contained in "The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism" [10].
- We support adoption of policy and practices as well as reports addressing modern day slavery in a company's global operations and supply chain to ensure the protection of fundamental human rights.
- We support adoption of policy to include respect for and adherence to the preservation of the traditional knowledge rights of traditional agricultural communities, including enjoyment of their own means of subsistence.
- We support the adoption of a comprehensive policy articulating the respect for and commitment to the human right to water [11].
- We support reports on systems to ensure a company contractor and suppliers are implementing human rights policies in their operations including monitoring, training, addressing issues of no-compliance and assuring that no modern day slavery concerns exist.
- We support reports regarding the expectation to privacy and freedom of expression on the internet. Such reports may deal with individual situations, resisting demands for censorship, and when a company agrees to legally-binding government filters, data retention, or third party use of data.
- We support asking a corporation to endorse any of the following sets of principles:
 - i. Bellagio Principles [12]
 - ii. Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 32 [13]
 - iii. Wood Sheppard Principles [14]

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- [1] <http://download.elca.org/ELCA Resource Repository/PeaceSS.pdf>
 - [2] <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>
 - [3] <http://download.elca.org/ELCA Resource Repository/PeaceSS.pdf>
 - [4] http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf
 - [5] <http://download.elca.org/ELCA Resource Repository/PeaceSS.pdf>
 - [6] http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Human_Rights_ResolutionsLCA78.PDF
 - [7] http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Peace_Justice_Rights_ALC72.pdf
 - [8] http://download.elca.org/ELCA Resource Repository/Economic_LifeSS.pdf
 - [9] <http://social.un.org/index/IndigenousPeoples/DeclarationontheRightsofIndigenousPeoples.aspx>
 - [10] <http://www.thecode.org/>
 - [11] http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/human_right_to_water.shtml
 - [12] http://www.iisd.org/measure/principles/progress/bellagio_full.asp
 - [13] <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
 - [14] http://www.yorku.ca/csr/Home/file_Codes_Compndium_Sept_2005.pdf