

Press Release

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'Inclusivity, diversity and equal opportunity should be core business values'

The Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB) today published a briefing paper aimed to help companies combat discrimination in hiring practices and in the workplace. The paper describes discrimination in policy, law and practice against several groups in Myanmar who are particularly at risk: women; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people (LGBT); people living with HIV; people with disabilities; ethnic minorities; and religious minorities.

All of these groups experience discrimination at the hands of the authorities, from employers, and in society more generally. Some individuals face discrimination on multiple grounds, for example women who are members of ethnic minorities, or women with disabilities.

'We would like to see all companies combat discrimination and make a commitment to having inclusivity, diversity and equal opportunity as core business values'. said Vicky Bowman, MCRB Director.

'But to combat discrimination effectively, companies need to be aware of the forms that it takes in Myanmar. While there are some obviously discriminatory laws still on the statute book, much of the discrimination in Myanmar today is a matter of societal attitudes, just like it is around the world. That means it may be ingrained in the way the company, and its workers, go about their jobs'.

'A manager may not even be aware of something being discriminatory, particularly when it concerns indirect discrimination. This briefing paper is intended to raise awareness of where the company might be failing to spot discrimination, or failing to act on it'.

The paper highlights how companies need to be alert to discrimination in their hiring practices, and check whether, for example, people living with disabilities able to access job application forms? Are managers preferring to hire from only their religion or ethnic minority group? Are job applicants being required to undergo unnecessary HIV tests?

Businesses also need to be aware of potential discrimination in their workplaces. Do able women with childcare or parent care responsibilities get excluded from promotion? Have businesses establishing whistleblowing mechanisms so that all employees can make complaints about bullying confidentially?

Businesses should also consider their products. Does their advertising reinforce stereotypes about women, gay people, or particular religions? Are their websites accessible to blind people who use 'screen readers'?

The paper provides practical recommendations to companies to address these challenges, including specific recommendations for each high-risk group.

Background

This Briefing Paper is part of a series on cross-cutting issues published by MCRB, which describe challenges facing businesses and set out detailed recommendations to them. Others include 'Indigenous People's Rights and Business in Myanmar', 'Land', and 'Children's Rights and Business'.

MCRB has also addressed discrimination in its sector-wide impact assessments (SWIAs) on Oil and Gas, Tourism, ICT and Mining. This Briefing Paper draws on the research findings of the SWIAs.

In June 2017 MCRB held a consultation with representatives from women's groups, organizations working on behalf of LGBT people, people living with HIV and disabilities, and ethnic and religious minorities, in order to reflect their concerns, suggestions, and recommendations to businesses in the briefing paper.

Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB) www.mcrb.org.mm is a Yangon-based initiative funded by the UK, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Ireland, based on a collaboration between the UK-based Institute for Human Rights and Business, and the Danish Institute for Human Rights. The Centre was established in 2013 to provide an effective and legitimate platform for the creation of knowledge, capacity and dialogue concerning responsible business in Myanmar, based on local needs and international standards, which results in more responsible business practices. It is a neutral platform working with business, civil society and government.

For more information, please contact Phyu Phyu Zin, Programme and Communication Officer Phyuphyu.zin@myanmar-responsiblebusiness.org 09799667713