The Editor, Financial Times

Sir,

Hugh Williamson reports (17 January 2011) that Amnesty and some other pressure groups fear that adoption of a proposed set of guiding principles for implementing the UN “Protect, Respect and Remedy” framework in the area of business and human rights “risk undermining efforts to strengthen corporate responsibility,” and that “the current draft should not be adopted by the Human Rights Council.” This is bizarre on several counts.

First, these same organizations keep telling the world that there currently are no global standards in the area of business and human rights, causing both governments and business enterprises to fall far short of desired practices. In contrast, the UN framework and guiding principles elevate standards of conduct significantly.

Second, these same organizations use the UN framework constantly as a basis for criticizing the performance of companies, governments and international agencies—so how inadequate and unacceptable could its implementation possibly be?

Third, Amnesty and the others would have a lot to answer for if they actually were to oppose Human Rights Council endorsement of this hard-won initiative. In 2004, they heavily promoted a scheme for regulating companies that had no champions among governments and triggered the vehement and unified opposition of the business community. What was the result? Victims of corporate-related human rights harm, for whom these organizations claim to speak, got nothing. Now, seven years later, we have a proposal on the table that enjoys broad support from governments, business associations, individual companies, as well as a wide array of civil society and workers’ organizations. Do Amnesty and the others really urge its defeat—delivering “nothing” to victims yet again? How much longer will they ask victims to wait in the name of some abstract and elusive global regulatory regime when practical results are achievable now?

Yours sincerely,

John Ruggie UN Special Representative for Business and Human Rights
Cambridge, USA