



Freedom of Assembly, Expression, Information

Despite the challenges that COVID-19 poses for gatherings, it is important that worker engagement and information disclosure activities continue during the pandemic. Everyone has the right to assemble peacefully, the right to express their opinion, and the right to seek and receive information. Lack of transparency, and repression of assembly and expression are ongoing human rights concerns associated with business activities. Companies need to respect workers' rights to form unions, associate, express concerns, and/or organize strikes. Measures that limit movement and gatherings must be justified, necessary, proportionate, and time-limited.¹ Companies also need to continue to respect stakeholder rights to express concerns and to participate in decisions that affect them.²

Measure to protect human rights freedom of assembly, expression and information

- ✓ Encourage alternate forms of assembly, advocacy, and expression (e.g. online, petitions, small groups, outdoor gatherings).
- ✓ Communicate and enforce clear, transparent, consistent labour and workplace policies, including information on worker and stakeholder rights to freedom of assembly, expression and information within the company and to contractors and suppliers.
- ✓ Communicate and enforce clear, transparent, consistent policies on engaging workers and stakeholders within the company and to contractors and suppliers.
- ✓ Engage with communities and conduct information disclosure activities through mutually acceptable alternative means (e.g. online, petitions, outdoor gatherings, small group meetings).
- ✓ Ensure that processes are in place to allow workers and stakeholders to communicate workplace and COVID-19 related concerns that question the mainstream media information without fear of negative consequences.
- ✓ Ensure that processes are in place to allow and respond to COVID-19 related concerns, including questioning the increasingly mandated regimens, raised by workers and stakeholders.
- ✓ Conduct regular audits/inspections and follow-up on findings (e.g. labour standards and occupational safety), including appropriate information disclosure.

Measures that violate human rights

- ✗ Prevent mobilizations or suppress expression of COVID-19 concerns through direct or indirect means (e.g. physical force, threat of dismissal or other consequences).
- ✗ Cancel or significantly postpone engagement or information disclosure activities due to COVID-19.
- ✗ Suppress, ignore, or fail to respond to COVID-19 concerns raised.
- ✗ Influence other stakeholders to prevent mobilizations or expression on the company's behalf.
- ✗ Cancel/delay audits/inspections due to COVID-19 (e.g. labour standards and occupational safety), including disclosing appropriate information.

¹ This human right is protected under a of international treaties including the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), and [ILO Convention No. 87 concerning Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize](#).

² OHCHR. (April 2020). States responses to COVID 19 threat should not halt freedoms of assembly and association. www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25788&LangID=E