



# To block or not to block: Corporate social responsibility of ICT companies during social unrest

*Lessons from the Arthur W. Page Center for Integrity in Public Communication*

## Student Guide

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**-STUDENT GUIDE-**  
**To block or not to block: Corporate social responsibility of ICT  
companies during social unrest**

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**RATIONALE AND OVERVIEW**

Arthur W. Page stood for responsibility and integrity in the telecommunications industry. He called upon the industry to “turn the searchlight on ourselves and see that we are actually, in every possible way, doing our job in the public interest” (Page, 1933, p. 6). Training students for careers in the information and communication technology (ICT) industry comes not only with an obligation to teach core concepts and analytical skills, but also the importance of having a professional conscience. The following teaching module engages students with ethical and professional standards of operating an ICT company (e.g., mobile telecommunications company, Internet service provider, or social media platform) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Across developed and developing countries, social media have been influential in social movements—many of which have even been referred to as “Twitter revolutions” or “Facebook revolutions”. While social media can be used to enable the exchange of ideas, mobilize peaceful participation, and leverage issues to national or global awareness, social media can also be used to encourage violence.

The utility of social media to aid social movement tactics was exemplified in 2011 when revolutions believed to have been mobilized through mobile telephone text messaging, Facebook, and Twitter resulted in the ousting of authoritarian leaders in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia. On the other hand, mobile telephone text messaging and Facebook were credited with spreading hate speech and encouraging ethnic-targeted killing during Kenya’s 2007 presidential election. Because of these situations, ICT companies have found themselves in an ethical dilemma between enabling the global free flow of information as a fundamental human right and blocking services as a means of ensuring public safety.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

At the completion of this teaching module, you should be able to:

1. Explain the information and communication technology for development (ICT4D) research paradigm, including how this paradigm can be used to explain the role of new media as tools for democracy.
2. Describe corporate social responsibility (CSR) in relation to the Page Principles and the United Nations Global Compact, including how CSR principles can be used to identify the social role and ethical duties of ICT companies in society.
3. Create principles of a “corporate conscience” based off of the Page Principles.

As a result of this teaching case, you will gain greater understanding of how ICTs have been used in social movements, including the roles of governments and ICT companies.

Furthermore, you will be able to articulate corporate social responsibility (CSR) principles and will be able to develop your own principles of a “corporate conscience”.

### **MODULE FORMAT**

This teaching module examines the role of CSR in the operation of multinational ICT companies during social movements. The module is composed of two parts. The first part contains a set of readings that will enable you to: (1) understand how ICTs have been used during social movements, including the positions that have been taken by governments and ICT companies and (2) understand principles of a corporate conscience and how these principles relate to the role of ICT companies in society.

The second part of the teaching module is an in-class role-playing activity. The goal of the activity is to further your understanding of the different positions of stakeholders on whether ICT services should be blocked within a developing country that is undergoing a violent social movement. The activity also asks you to create CSR principles to guide your decision.

In order to further your understanding of how this issue has been addressed in the past, research-based case studies on the role taken by multinational telecommunications companies during Egypt’s 2011 revolution and Kenya’s 2007 presidential election are reviewed (see Appendix A).

### **KEY CONCEPTS**

#### **Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D)**

Broadly defined, information and communication technology for development is a field of research that seeks to understand how information and communications technologies (e.g., mobile telephones, computers, tablets, Internet access, etc.) can be used to support social, political, and economic development (Unwin, 2009).

#### **Corporate Social Responsibility**

Corporate social responsibility is broadly defined as the “voluntary actions that a corporation implements as it pursues its mission and fulfills its perceived obligations to stakeholders, including employees, communities, the environment, and society as a whole” (Coombs & Holladay, 2012, p. 8).

### **MODULE ACTIVITY: PART ONE**

#### ***Overview***

Part one introduces you to the ICT4D research paradigm. To contextualize the concept, case study summaries of how ICTs were used during the 2011 Egyptian revolution and during the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya are reviewed. Both cases are provided in Appendix A. After reading the two cases, you will be introduced to the concept of corporate social responsibility through an oral interview with Lawrence G. Foster, through a discussion of the Page Principles, and through a discussion of the United Nations Global Compact.

### ***Learning Objectives***

At the completion of part one, you should be able to:

1. Explain the information and communication technology for development (ICT4D) research paradigm, including how this paradigm can be used to explain the role of new media as tools for democracy.
2. Describe corporate social responsibility (CSR) in relation to Page's Principles and the United Nations Global Compact, including how CSR principles can be used to identify the social role and ethical duties of ICT companies in society.

### ***Materials Needed***

1. Heeks, R. (2010). ICT4D 2.0: The next phase of applying ICT for international development. *Millennium Development Goals Review*. Retrieved from <http://www.mdg-review.org/PDFs/CDIApr10.pdf>
2. Kenya Case Study—The 2007-2008 Post-election Violence (see Appendix A)
3. Egypt Case Study—The 2011 Revolution (see Appendix A)
4. Foster, L.G. Interview. Oral history with Lawrence G. Foster. The Arthur W. Page Center. Retrieved from <http://thepagecenter.comm.psu.edu/index.php/oral-history-collection/finding-index/106-oral-history-with-lawrence-g-foster-dick-martin-interview>
5. Page, A.W. *The Page Principles*. The Arthur W. Page Center. Retrieved from <http://thepagecenter.comm.psu.edu/index.php/about-the-page-center/the-page-principles>
6. United Nations (2013). *United Nations Global Compact: The ten principles*. Retrieved from <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/AboutTheGC/TheTenPrinciples/index.html>

### ***Activity***

You should review Heeks (2010), the Kenya case study, the Egypt case study, the Lawrence G. Foster interview, the Page Principles, and principles one and two from the United Nations Global Compact before class.

Your instructor will assign you to groups of five. Each group should first review the part one activity handout (see Appendix A). You have 25-30 minutes to review the handout and to discuss the questions. After you are done discussing the questions, the class will discuss each group's answers to the four discussion questions. The student handout needed to complete part one is provided in Appendix A. The student handout includes: (1) the Kenya case study, (2) the Egypt case study, (3) a summary of the Page Principles, (4) a summary of principles one and two from the United Nations Global Compact, and (5) the discussion questions (also listed below).

### ***Discussion Questions***

1. How did the Egyptian and Kenyan cases differ? How were the cases similar?
2. How might the Page Principles be used to help guide ICT companies when requested by governments to block services during social movements?

3. What does it mean for an ICT company to be socially and ethically responsible? How can the Page Principles and the United Nations Global Compact be used to answer this question?
4. Lawrence G. Foster indicated the importance of considering the needs of stakeholders when managing a crisis. Please try to argue why the following stakeholder groups *would* or *would not* support the blocking of ICT services in Egypt and Kenya: (1) high-level executive in a multinational ICT company, (2) customer, (3) member of the community (non-customer), (4) investor/shareholder, and (5) government official.

## **MODULE ACTIVITY: PART TWO**

### ***Overview***

There are two goals of this role-playing activity. The first goal is to understand the impacts of blocking ICT services from multiple stakeholder viewpoints. The second goal is to create principles of a “corporate conscience” based off of Page’s Principles.

Within this activity you will role-play a stakeholder position within a fictitious developing country called Mabira. Mabira is located in sub-Saharan Africa and is currently undergoing a violent social movement. ICTs are being credited with mobilizing protestors and bringing awareness of the movement to the global stage. The mission of the social movement is to overthrow the authoritarian government. Reports have emerged that ICTs are being used to spread hate speech that has caused ethnic-targeted killings. The national government has requested that the largest mobile telecommunications provider, EqualComm, suspend user access to its voice and data services as a means of ensuring public safety. In order to decide whether to block services, EqualComm has organized a meeting with representatives from five primary stakeholder groups, including the following: 1) a high-level executive in EqualComm, (2) an EqualComm customer, (3) a member of the community (non-customer), (4) an EqualComm investor/shareholder, and (5) a Mabira Government official.

### ***Learning Objective***

1. To create principles of a “corporate conscience” based off of the Page Principles.

### ***Materials Needed***

A student handout for part two is provided in Appendix B. The handout includes the following:

1. An overview of the current state of EqualComm globally and within Mabira
2. An overview of the social, political, and economic climate of Mabira
3. An outline of the Page Principles
4. An outline of the United Nations Global Compact
5. Discussion questions

### ***Activity Tasks***

Your instructor will separate you into groups of five. You will have approximately 30 minutes to complete this activity.

#### **1. Assign stakeholder roles\***

Please select one individual in your group to represent each of the following five stakeholder roles:

1. High-level executive in EqualComm
2. EqualComm customer
3. Member of the community (non-customer)
4. EqualComm Investor/Shareholder
5. Mabira government official

**\*Important - Elect one individual from your group to write down your group's work. You will be presenting your group's work to the rest of the class.**

#### **2. Review background material (see Appendix B)**

Please review the following before completing the role-playing and discussion questions: (1) the overview of EqualComm, (2) the overview of Mabira, (3) the summary of the Page Principles, and (4) the summary of the United Nations Global Compact.

#### **3. Complete Discussion Questions (see Appendix B)**

Please role-play your answer to question 1. Please summarize insights gained from the role-play activity under question 1. Use the insights gained from the role-play activity in question 1 to help guide your group's answers to questions 2 and 3. You will share your group's responses with the rest of the class. The discussion questions are located in Appendix B.

### **REFERENCES**

Coombs, W.T. & Holladay, S.J. (2012). *Managing corporate social responsibility: A communication approach*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**PART ONE IN-CLASS ACTIVITY**

**“To block or not to block”**  
**STUDENT GUIDE**

**1. EGYPT AND KENYA CASE STUDIES**

With approval from the authors, the following cases have been copied from Olorunnisola, A. & Martin, B. (2013). Influences of media on social movements: Problematising hyperbolic inferences about impacts. *Telematics & Informatics*, 30(3), 275-288.

***1.1. Egypt Case Study—The 2011 Egyptian Revolution***

The spring 2011 resignation of Egypt’s President Hosni Mubarak called global attention to the role of new ICTs in the dissemination of dissenting viewpoints (Kirkpatrick, 2011; Sharp, 2011). The Egyptian government revoked Al Jazeera Network’s license to broadcast and six of Al Jazeera’s correspondents were arrested (Al Jazeera, 2011; Pompeo, 2011). Nile Television and Akhbar Egypt, the state-owned broadcasters, ran pro-Mubarak news and showcased pro-Mubarak rallies (Abouzeid, 2011).

While only traditional media that showcased pro-Mubarak content were allowed to report, new ICTs including mobile phones and social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter were thought to have enabled dissemination of dissenting viewpoints. These social networking websites have been credited with increasing the ability for Egyptians to quickly and efficiently mobilize in Tahrir Square, Cairo and raise awareness of the movement to a global audience (Dreyfuss, 2011; Radsch, 2011). Additionally, mobile phone text messaging was thought to have aided the dissemination of coordination information (Ibrahim, 2011).

The counter-movements were able to gain significant local and global awareness of their issues by utilizing online platforms. For example, one Facebook group that posted updates on the nature and locations of the Egyptian protests on their page amassed 56,000 followers within 24 hours of its creation (Radsch, 2011). In addition, an approximate 15,000 Egyptians were using Twitter to send messages concerning the nature and location of protests (O’Dell, 2011). Examples of citizen-distributed text messages included the following:

Tahrir protesters are massing in 1000s, but word being passed that the BIG demo is at 3pm (BBC, 2011a).

More protesters are back in the streets shouting: Down with Mubarak. They are on the Corniche (BBC, 2011b).

The Egyptian government shut down the Internet and text messaging within the first two days of rioting as a means to restrict citizens’ ability to use these platforms for mobilization (CNN, 2011). Justified by the emergency powers provided in Egypt’s Telecommunications Act of 2003, Vodafone, Mobinil, and Etisalat complied with the

government's request to disable customer use and enable government access to the text messaging networks (AP, 2011; RWB, 2011). Aware of the power of new ICTs, the government restricted citizens' use and distributed pro-Mubarak text messages that urged the country's "honest and loyal men to confront the traitors and criminals and protect our people and honor" (Satter, 2011). The government also distributed text messages that identified the location of pro-Mubarak rallies (Satter, 2011). Examples of pro-Mubarak government-distributed text messages included the following:

Egyptian youth beware of rumors and listen to the voice of reason. Egypt is above everyone so protect it (Vodafone, 2011).

Massive demonstration to start at noon this Wednesday from Mustafa Mahmoud Square, in support of President Mubarak (Presstv, 2011).

While the government attempted to thwart citizens' ability to mobilize through the use of new ICTs, traditional landline telecommunications and mobile voice communication remained active. Circumventive techniques included using dial-up Internet modems, connecting to Internet service providers (ISPs) outside of Egypt, employing the "Speak 2 Tweet" Twitter function, and connecting to the ISP *Noor Group* which was still online as it serves the country's Stock Exchange and provides service to many large multinational corporations (BBC, 2011c). Google, Twitter, and SayNow created the "Speak 2 Tweet" service during the Egyptian blackout to allow anti-government protestors to call a specified telephone number that would record the caller's statement and post a link to the voice recording on Twitter (O'Dell, 2011).

### ***1.2. Kenya Case Study—The 2007-2008 Post-election Violence***

Following the 2007 announcement of the highly contested presidential re-election of Mwai Kibaki, the media, in particular privately owned radio stations, had been accused of fueling ethnic-targeted violence. Stations were either accused of airing hate speech concerning the president's tribe, the Kikuyus, or the tribes that aligned with the opposition party, the Kalenjin, Luo, and Luhya (see Chege, 2008). Referencing the role of the radio to incite anger and ethnic-targeted killings in Rwanda's 1994 genocide, the Kenyan government justified banning all live broadcasts as necessary to weaken social tensions (Wanjiku, 2009).

As the government closed traditional forms of mass communication, text messaging and Internet applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Ushahidi (a website that allows users to announce and geographically map crisis situations through submitting online posts or text message updates) and Mashada (a blogging website), became sources of information on the location and nature of riots throughout Kenya (Makinen & Kuira, 2008). Ushahidi and Mashada were used to voice positive and negative social discourse concerning the contested presidential election (Goldstein & Rotich, 2010). Concurrently with the use of blogs, citizens began using text messages to spread hate speech urging recipients to express their frustrations with the election results and to unleash violence on other ethnic groups (Goldstein & Rotich, 2010). Examples of hate speech text messages distributed from pro- and anti-government protesters include the following (NPR, 2008):

We say no more innocent Kikuyu blood will be shed. We will slaughter them right here in the capital city. For justice, compile a list of Luos and Kalus you know at work or in your estates, or elsewhere in Nairobi, plus where and how their children go to school. We will give you numbers to text this information.

Fellow Kenyans, the Kikuyu's have stolen our children's future. Hope of removing them through the ballot has been stolen. We must deal with them the way they understand, violence. We must dominate them.

After identifying the use of text messages to spread hate speech and mobilize citizens, the government attempted to have Kenya's largest mobile telephone service provider, Safaricom, disable citizens' ability to distribute text messages (Goldstein & Rotich, 2010). However, Safaricom refused to disable service and instead distributed its own "messages of peace" to all customers. Safaricom distributed the following "text message of peace" to all of its customers (NPR, 2008):

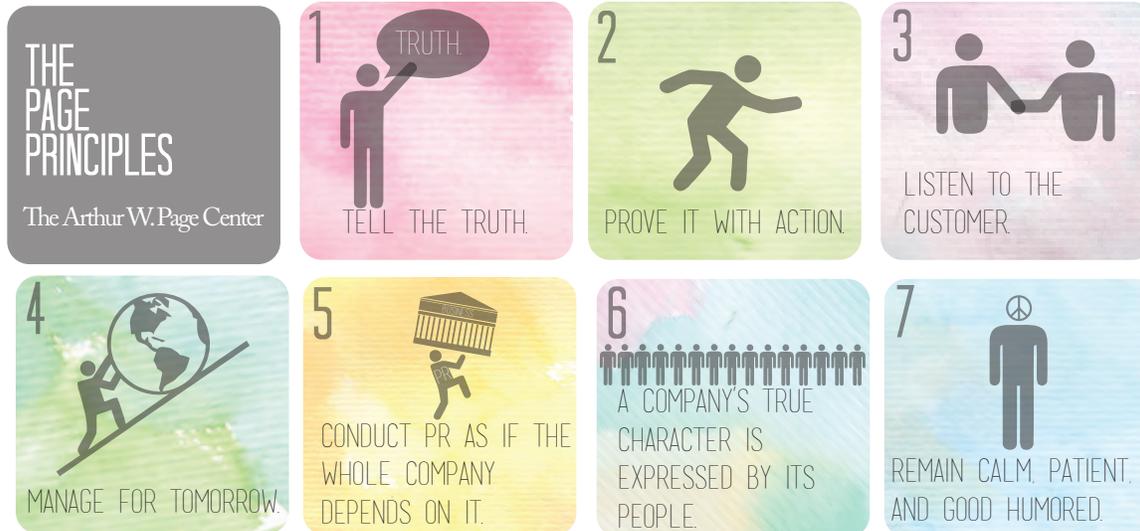
In the interest of peace, we appeal to Kenyans to embrace each other in the spirit of patriotism and exercise strength to restore calm to our nation. Prevent trouble; choose peace.

The use of text messages to spread hate speech during the post-election violence has been credited with fueling the violence and killing of approximately 1,500 Kenyans (Goldstein & Rotich, 2010).

## 2. SUMMARIES OF THE PAGE PRINCIPLES AND UN GLOBAL COMPACT

**Instructions:** Review the Page Principles and principles one and two from the United Nations Global Compact.

### THE PAGE PRINCIPLES



1. **Tell the truth.** Let the public know what's happening and provide an accurate picture of the company's character, ideals and practices.
2. **Prove it with action.** Public perception of an organization is determined 90 percent by what it does and ten percent by what it says.
3. **Listen to the customer.** To serve the company well, understand what the public wants and needs. Keep top decision makers and other employees informed about public reaction to company products, policies and practices.
4. **Manage for tomorrow.** Anticipate public reaction and eliminate practices that create difficulties. Generate goodwill.
5. **Conduct public relations as if the whole company depends on it.** Corporate relations is a management function. No corporate strategy should be implemented without considering its impact on the public. The public relations professional is a policy maker capable of handling a wide range of corporate communications activities.
6. **Realize a company's true character is expressed by its people.** The strongest opinions—good or bad—about a company are shaped by the words and deeds of its employees. As a result, every employee—active or retired—is involved with public relations. It is the responsibility of corporate communications to support each employee's capability and desire to be an honest, knowledgeable ambassador to customers, friends, shareowners and public officials
7. **Remain calm, patient and good-humored.** Lay the groundwork for public relations miracles with consistent, calm and reasoned attention to information and contacts. When a crisis arises, remember that cool heads communicate best.

**Source:** Page, A.W. (2013). The Page Principles. The Arthur W. Page Center. Retrieved from <http://thepagecenter.comm.psu.edu/index.php/about-the-page-center/the-page-principles>

## THE UNITED NATIONS GLOBAL COMPACT

The United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) is the largest voluntary corporate social responsibility initiative in the world (UNGC, 2013). The UNGC encourages businesses to implement ten principles that promote human rights, labor rights, environmental sustainability, and anti-corruption (ibid.). The goal of the UNGC is to encourage business practices that produce economic and social benefits for people worldwide. As of 2013, over 10,000 businesses have committed to implementing the UNGC principles (ibid.). You can read more about the ten principles on the UNGC website: <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/AboutTheGC/TheTenPrinciples/index.html>



There are two principles related to upholding human rights in the United Nations Global Compact:

1. **Support and respect human rights.** Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights can be read here: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>
2. **Do not be complicit in human rights abuses.** Businesses should not be engaged in direct, beneficial, or silent complicity in human rights abuses. Direct complicity is when a business knowingly provides goods or services that negatively impact human rights, beneficial complicity is when a business positively benefits from abuses in human rights even if the business did not directly cause the abuse, and silent complicity is when a business is inactive in deterring human rights abuses.

**Source:** United Nations Global Compact [UNGC] (2013). *The Ten Principles*. Retrieved from <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/AboutTheGC/TheTenPrinciples/index.html>

### 3. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**Instructions:** Answer questions 1-4 with your classmates. Please select a member in your group to record your group's responses to each question. You will share your group's responses with the rest of the class.

1. How did the Egyptian and Kenyan cases differ? How were the cases similar?
2. How might the Page Principles be used to help guide ICT companies when requested by governments to block services during social movements?
3. What does it mean for an ICT company to be socially and ethically responsible? How can the Page Principles and the United Nations Global Compact be used to answer this question?
4. Lawrence G. Foster indicated the importance of considering the needs of stakeholders when managing a crisis. Please argue why the following stakeholder groups would or would not have supported the blocking of ICT services in Egypt and Kenya: (1) high-level executive in a multinational ICT company, (2) customer, (3) member of the community (non-customer), (4) investor/shareholder, and (5) government official.

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**APPENDIX B  
PART TWO IN-CLASS ACTIVITY**

**“To block or not to block”  
STUDENT GUIDE**

**1. OVERVIEW OF EQUALCOMM AND MABIRA**



**Key Facts and Statistics:**

- EqualComm is the world's leading mobile telecommunications company operating across four continents: Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America.
- EqualComm offers mobile voice and data communications services.
- EqualComm is headquartered in the United States.
- EqualComm has over 120,000 employees worldwide.
- EqualComm had gross revenue of \$40 billion in 2012.
- Beginning in 2008, EqualComm initiated its mission to develop mobile telecommunications applications that address social, political, and economic development issues in developing countries.
- EqualComm has an 80% market share in Mabira.



Mabira is a developing country located in sub-Saharan Africa. An authoritarian government has been in power since 1986. In 2013, a social movement called “Free Mabira” emerged with a mission to overthrow the government and hold the first democratic elections. The movement has been active on social media and has gained worldwide attention by tagging government atrocities with the #FreeMabira hashtag.

**Mabira Facts and Statistics:**

- **Population size:** Approx. 33 million
- **People with a mobile telephone subscription:** Approx. 40%
- **People living with HIV:** Approx. 1.3 million
- **People who are employed in agriculture:** Approx. 66% of population
- **Level of education achieved:** The majority of the population has completed seventh grade.

## 2. SUMMARIES OF THE PAGE PRINCIPLES AND UN GLOBAL COMPACT

**Instructions:** Review the Page Principles and principles one and two from the United Nations Global Compact.

### THE PAGE PRINCIPLES



1. **Tell the truth.** Let the public know what's happening and provide an accurate picture of the company's character, ideals and practices.
2. **Prove it with action.** Public perception of an organization is determined 90 percent by what it does and ten percent by what it says.
3. **Listen to the customer.** To serve the company well, understand what the public wants and needs. Keep top decision makers and other employees informed about public reaction to company products, policies and practices.
4. **Manage for tomorrow.** Anticipate public reaction and eliminate practices that create difficulties. Generate goodwill.
5. **Conduct public relations as if the whole company depends on it.** Corporate relations is a management function. No corporate strategy should be implemented without considering its impact on the public. The public relations professional is a policy maker capable of handling a wide range of corporate communications activities.
6. **Realize a company's true character is expressed by its people.** The strongest opinions—good or bad—about a company are shaped by the words and deeds of its employees. As a result, every employee—active or retired—is involved with public relations. It is the responsibility of corporate communications to support each employee's capability and desire to be an honest, knowledgeable ambassador to customers, friends, shareowners and public officials
7. **Remain calm, patient and good-humored.** Lay the groundwork for public relations miracles with consistent, calm and reasoned attention to information and contacts. When a crisis arises, remember that cool heads communicate best.

**Source:** Page, A.W. (2013). The Page Principles. The Arthur W. Page Center. Retrieved from <http://thepagecenter.comm.psu.edu/index.php/about-the-page-center/the-page-principles>

## THE UNITED NATIONS GLOBAL COMPACT

The United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) is the largest voluntary corporate social responsibility initiative in the world (UNGC, 2013). The UNGC encourages businesses to implement ten principles that promote human rights, labor rights, environmental sustainability, and anti-corruption (ibid.). The goal of the UNGC is to encourage business practices that produce economic and social benefits for people worldwide. As of 2013, over 10,000 businesses have committed to implementing the UNGC principles (ibid.). You can read more about the ten principles on the UNGC website: <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/AboutTheGC/TheTenPrinciples/index.html>



There are two principles related to upholding human rights in the United Nations Global Compact:

- 1. Support and respect human rights.** Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights can be read here: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>
- 2. Do not be complicit in human rights abuses.** Businesses should not be engaged in direct, beneficial, or silent complicity in human rights abuses. Direct complicity is when a business knowingly provides goods or services that negatively impact human rights, beneficial complicity is when a business positively benefits from abuses in human rights even if the business did not directly cause the abuse, and silent complicity is when a business is inactive in deterring human rights abuses.

**Source:** United Nations Global Compact [UNGC] (2013). *The Ten Principles*. Retrieved from <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/AboutTheGC/TheTenPrinciples/index.html>

### 3. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**Instructions:** Please select a member in your group to record your group's responses to each question. You will share your group's responses with the rest of the class. Answer questions 1-3 with your classmates. Please role-play your answer to question 1 and summarize insights gained in the space provided. Use the insights gained from the role-play activity to help guide your group's answers to questions 2 and 3.

**1. Role-playing:** Using your assigned stakeholder role, discuss the impacts of blocking or not blocking ICT services. Drawing from the ICT4D research paradigm, what are some of the social, political, and economic impacts of blocking and not blocking ICT services?

**2. Group discussion:** How can the Page Principles be applied to construct principles of a corporate conscience to guide EqualComm's decision?

**3. Group discussion:** What should be included in principles of a "corporate conscience" to help guide EqualComm's decision?