

High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence

Thank you Mr. Chair. I am here as the representative of the organizing partners of the Business & Industry Major Group at the UNCSD, that is, my own organization, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, and the International Chamber of Commerce.

We have made a submission, which is before you. I will not try to summarize it now. What I would rather do is emphasize and complement those aspects, which more directly concern business.

Let me start with 4 introductory remarks:

1. Business cannot succeed in societies that fail. So for us, the private sector, a strong, efficient and effective United Nations is in our interest.
2. Today the boundary lines that define and divide the role of business from those of governments and NGOs are blurring and continually shifting. Clearly business' principal contribution to society is to build wealth, generate entrepreneurship, create employment and pay taxes. The ongoing process of UN reform should recognize this unique business' contribution to the Millennium Development Goals and other governmental commitments.
3. My third point is about accountability. Just as society is demanding more accountability on business - following a number of scandals that have dented society's trust in business - the same principle of accountability should permeate all levels of the UN. Goals that are set by member states must be reached. People, individuals, must be asked to account just as society asks CEOs and managers to account.
4. Since 1946 business has engaged in a broad range of activities in the UN and has supported almost every part of the UN system. The diversity of the business community --

in terms of nationality, sector, size, expertise, experience and viewpoint -- is a resource of innovation for the UN. For business to make substantive contributions in UN discussions and consultations, it must be allowed to have a true seat at the table and it must be invited at an early stage and be given air time.

With these introductory remarks I would now like to address the questions you asked from 2 perspectives: first the global perspective – mainstreaming sustainable development at the UN, second the local perspective which deals with implementation.

Mainstreaming Sustainable Development at the UN

A balanced approach to economic, social and environmental issues is more important than ever. Progressive businesses are today putting sustainable development at the heart of their long-term strategy. We firmly believe that this approach would greatly enhance the work of the UN. We agree with other major groups that development and environment should be fully integrated, and that environment should be strengthened in all areas of the UN's work.

To increase the UN's effectiveness, we have made several recommendations but I only want to mention 2 here:

- o First, a simplification of entry-points into the UN. For the business community the Commission on Sustainable Development represents an important entry-point in the UN. So our wish is to see it strengthened, with clear priorities and long-term frameworks. It should also strike a fair balance between the three pillars of sustainable development and hence be supported not only by environmental ministers, but also those concerned with finance, habitat and development cooperation.
- o Second, we need strong coordinating units at the UN (for ex on water), otherwise our efforts to engage are dispersed.

Implementation

Companies operate at the local level. Even global companies do so. But for business to succeed it needs sound and predictable long-term enabling frameworks. The UN should continue to promote such frameworks through good governance, transparency, impartiality and arbitration at country-level. It should assist governments to set local strategies and economic, environmental and poverty reduction priorities, coherent with agreed international objectives. Finally it should encourage voluntary approaches and partnerships as helpful supplements to governmental commitments and actions.

UN reform should strengthen national resources and capacity building for implementation, taking into account the necessary flexibility needed to reflect different country circumstances and priorities.

Finally the UN should ensure that greater coordination of UN programmes and activities takes place at the national level and help governments implementing strong national development agendas.

In conclusion, UN reform should strive to put sustainable development at the center of the UN work, integrate environment and development, strengthen the environment focus, and simplify the structure in order to allow business to be more a meaningful partner.