

UN Global Compact Seventh Annual Local Networks Forum

Opening Plenary Session remarks by Mary Robinson

Istanbul, Turkey, 9 June 2009

It is a pleasure to be here in Istanbul for the seventh annual Global Compact Local Networks Forum. I found last year's Networks meeting in Bonn very useful so am happy to be able to join you again. I think we all agree that the annual forums provide a much needed space to share experiences and learn about the challenges and opportunities network representatives from around the world see in making the Global Compact's vision a reality at local and national levels.

Allow me to acknowledge my fellow Global Compact Board members who are here with us in Istanbul: Mrs. Chen Ying, Mrs. Habiba Al Marashi, Ms. Futhi Mtoba and Mr. Juan de la Mota. I think I speak for my Board colleagues in encouraging all of you as Local Network representatives to be open and share your views with us over the next two days. Your input is extremely valuable to us in carrying out our roles as members of the Board.

As you know, next year we mark the Global Compact's 10th anniversary. The ongoing global economic and financial crisis highlights with new urgency the importance of embedding principles, values and greater responsibility into the global marketplace. So we certainly should use this time to take stock and plan for the future. Stock-taking has already begun in the recently released Global Compact 2008 review. It shows not only the continuing growth and development of the Compact but also points to significant challenges which remain.

All of you know these challenges well. They include the ongoing work to ensure that participants take an integrated approach to implementing all Global Compact principles throughout and beyond headquarters, including into subsidiaries and the supply chain. And in terms of disclosure, the Review points out the current limitations of reporting practices and the need to strike the right balance between issues like reporting on policies with information on how this changes practices and results in impacts on the ground.

Our stock-taking efforts leading up to the 10th anniversary should of course include reflection on the Global Compact's work at country level. As I have said before, Local Networks have critical roles to play – both in rooting the Global Compact within different national, cultural and language contexts and in supporting companies with respect to implementation of the Compact principles.

I'm aware that at this Forum you are launching the "Local Network Report 2008". It clearly shows the importance of your activities at country level. One area I wish to highlight in particular concerns your role in safeguarding the integrity of the Global Compact. I know many networks are now actively engaging in the Communication on Progress process to help ensure that companies fulfil the requirement to report on the steps they are taking with respect to integrating the Compact principles into corporate policies and practices. Equally important, I'm aware that a growing number of networks are playing a constructive role with respect to complaints filed against network participants, primarily by initiating dialogue between the parties or by referring cases to the Global Compact Office in order to initiate its dialogue facilitation mechanism. I would encourage all of you to increase such efforts to support these integrity issues which are of such crucial importance in further strengthening the legitimacy of the Global Compact in the time ahead.

Before closing, let me briefly turn to another subject where the work of Local Networks is of great importance – the area human rights. I was pleased to see how many of you used the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights last year to place human rights issues more firmly on the agenda of local networks. Members of the Compact's Human Rights Working Group were so pleased with our discussions with Local Network representatives in Bonn that we decided to meet in parallel with your Forum here in Istanbul. All of you are welcome to participate in some or all of our Working Group meeting that begins this morning and runs through tomorrow.

The Working Group will be covering a range of issues at this session. A number of Local Network representatives are already planning to join us but we would welcome all of your input on topics we will be discussing including: the next phase of the work of the UN Special Representative on Business and Human Rights, John Ruggie; the development by the Working Group of good management practices on human rights;

consultations around proposed Principles for advancing women's rights in the workplace, marketplace and community; a new human rights solutions forum that will shortly be launched to help find practical solutions to human rights dilemmas business face; and the development of further guidance on human rights reporting. We'll also be reflecting on lessons from the recently concluded Business Leaders Initiative on Human Rights and looking ahead to new initiatives underway such as the Global Business Initiative on Human Rights. So you can see we have a busy and interesting agenda planned.

Let me close by thanking you all once again for your commitment to making the Global Compact come to life around the world. I look forward to hearing from you and taking part in your discussions here in Istanbul.

Thank you.