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voice for business

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Business and Industry Group

#FromTalktoAction

Turn the Agenda 2030 into an engine for change

Progress on the SDGs is sluggish – the Agenda 2030 is threatened to fail.

The High-level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2019 confirmed that progress on the implementation of the Agenda 2030 is sluggish, and the international community is not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) over the next decade. To reverse this trend, stronger and more determined efforts are required to ensure the goals and targets of Agenda 2030 are met and that sustainable societies, economies and environments are created that protect people, the planet and prosperity.

Business is committed to play its part in reaching the SDGs...

The Business and Industry Group has shown from the outset strong support for the SDGs, and its readiness to work and cooperate at national and international levels to reach the targets. The diverse employer and business federations, business groups and initiatives as well as companies within the Business and Industry Group are committed to contributing to the global efforts towards achieving Agenda 2030. One example being the dedicated web site by the United States Council for International Business on Agenda 2030 – <http://www.businessfor2030.org/>.

....but the possibilities for business to engage need to improve.

The potential of the private sector to build a prosperous and sustainable global economy and to address the imminent challenges we face has not been fully capitalised to date. As several UN assessments have shown, the organisation needs to improve the way it engages with companies. Processes to develop partnerships are too long, bureaucratic and opaque. The know-how and expertise of the private sector through the Business and Industry Group should inform much more the discussions on the Agenda 2030 and relevant policies. At the national level, legal and government policy frameworks do not integrate the SDGs, and the engagement of companies and their respective organisations is insufficient.

The United Nations needs to call for greater global action on achieving Agenda 2030, using the occasion of its 75th anniversary in 2020 to galvanise the international community to act now.

Some actions to be taken include:

1) **Revise HLPF governance**

- Strengthened peer review through improved Voluntary National Reviews (VNR): The VNR process must be more inclusive by enabling greater input from business and civil society. It must also become more stringent by using standardised reporting formats, frameworks and metrics to identify challenges and gaps across goals. Lastly, VNRs need to be more action-oriented and provide concrete recommendations that can be evaluated. All of this requires governments to engage constructively and more critically in the debates.
- Improved monitoring of progress through better data: More and better data are needed to monitor progress on SDG targets. An up-to-date and open database on the SDGs would be an important step to make this information easily accessible and to track progress.
- More determined follow-up to the HLPF at national level: The SDGs are not implemented at the UN in New York or Geneva, but at the national and local level. Implementation of policy recommendations from the HLPF, particularly the VNRs, is key. The HLPF and VNR processes are not ends in themselves but serve as a means to lead to peer learning which triggers change on the ground. More accountability and transparency are needed for effective follow-up. UN DESA should consider implementation of a consultation process to identify measures to strengthen information, discussion and monitoring/tracking on follow-up activities.
- Increased dialogue with the private sector: Policy work at the UN, regional and national level needs to integrate business views on a more systematic basis. The private sector brings important expertise and knowledge on actions, measures and policies needed to implement the Agenda 2030. It is in the DNA of business to turn challenges into opportunities and to innovate and develop practical and realistic solutions for the problems we face. The Business and Industry Group is committed to step up its engagement with UN DESA, UN Member States, Civil Society and all other Stakeholders to move the implementation of the SDGs forward.

2) **Unleash the potential of partnerships**

- As clearly reflected in SDG 17 and throughout Agenda 2030, partnerships are key for reaching the SDGs, then we need to mainstream collaborative approaches between the UN, governments, civil society, and business throughout the implementation of the Agenda 2030.
- The UN and the public sector need to become more agile and develop fresh and innovative approaches to improve collaboration with the private sector. The members of the Business and Industry Group are committed to raising awareness of the SDGs, particularly among companies that have had no or limited involvement

in the Agenda 2030. The aim must be to expand the number of joint public-private initiatives beyond the usual front runners.

- One of the main challenges to achieving the Agenda 2030 is financial resources. Domestic resource mobilisation is one of the core pillars identified in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda to help close this gap. However, even with a robust plan incorporating financing for development, there is still a risk of not reaching a key target of SDG 16, which is to significantly reduce IFFs (illicit financial flows). The transnational nature of this issue requires the public and private sector to collaborate and integrate global led initiatives.
- Business and Industry Group members are committed to building bridges between the UN, the public sector, civil society and business. Our purpose is to create partnerships between interested companies and UN agencies that facilitate collective engagement on the implementation and follow-up mechanisms of the 2030 Development Agenda.

3) Focus on implementation

- The SDG Summit of Heads of State must focus on implementation. The legitimacy of the Agenda 2030 depends on its impact on the world. This will not happen by accident – it must be intentional and requires the commitment of the leaders to live-up to their promises. The Agenda 2030 must become an engine for reform at the national, regional and international levels. The UN Secretary-General's reform efforts are an important step in this regard. National Governments must follow.

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