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Breakout Session "Civil Society and Business: Working Together for Peace, Security and Sustainable Development"

Background

In 2015, United Nations Member States completed the Third International Conference on Financing for Development and unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. One of the key challenges for the success of the *2030 Development Agenda* now relies on *effective partnerships*, involving both the private sector and civil society organizations (CSO). In this regard, the UN *Sustainable Development Goal* #17 states: **Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society <u>partnerships</u>, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of <u>partnerships</u>.**

Prior to the adoption of the new SDG #17, the UN *Millennium Development Goal* #8 had encouraged Member States in 2001 to "*develop a global partnership for development*", with reference in its targets/indicators to the "*private sector''* (but not to civil society organizations).

In its report entitled "*Lessons from MDG#8''*, the UN MDG Task Force recognized the MDG#8 "*imprecisions*": "Over the course of the reporting experience, the Task Force has noted major gaps, not only regarding the achievement of the targets set in MDG 8, but also regarding its monitoring. Particularly serious has been the lack of quantitative time-bound targets in the five substantive areas, as well as the lack of data to track quantitative and qualitative commitments adequately and in a timely manner. In addition, some MDG 8 indicators displayed a mismatch between targets set and indicators chosen to identify progress". The UN Task Force on MDG#8 concluded: ***"Achieving the SDGs will require an even stronger <u>global partnership</u>, complemented by <u>multi-stakeholder partnerships</u> to mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources".***

With the SDG #17 now officially including both Civil Society Organizations and the private sector in its *global partnership*, this breakout session addresses how to achieve more effective partnerships between CSOs, the private sector, government and the United Nations.

It may still appear utopian to talk about inclusive societies when our divided and fragmented world seems trending in the opposite direction. Solidarity and a sense of community are under strain even within countries, to say nothing of the gaps that exist between countries. As a global community, we are challenged by growing economic inequality, war, civil strife, unrest, population displacement, refugees, terrorism, environmental degradation, competition for natural resources, and natural disasters to name but a few. Governments and international organizations are important actors for addressing these national and global challenges. However, rebuilding the fabric of societies in the face of war and dislocation, maintaining peace and ensuring security, promoting cultural diversity, while building a more sustainable economic system that provides justice for all, offers a unique opportunity for action by all segments of civil society including private business, religious institutions, schools and universities and other socially oriented organizations. There is plenty of work for all. The issue is how to ensure that business and other civil society organizations cooperate effectively for the common good, when it often appears they have divergent objectives and capabilities.

Points of Discussion:

- How to encourage CSOs and the business sector to form networks and umbrella organizations to ensure broad, regionally balanced representation and to reduce the possible problems from having too many divergent voices?
- How to promote partnerships between CSOs and the business sector at the operational level to provide real services to local communities or to advance common social or economic objectives?
- How to overcome key obstacles that often separate CSOs and business enterprises is the different ways in which they view their respective roles, and their different goals, with company goals pursuing profit-making while CSOs often see themselves as representatives of the local community or guardian of a special interest, like the environment?
- CSOs can be particularly effective in building bridges between communities and companies. One issue for discussion is how to engage in an open dialogue, overcome implicit assumptions and biases and identify concrete areas of common interest where they can work together?
- CSOs are often adept at building and maintaining citizen-based networks and in working with poor communities in ways not available to a private company. Where CSOs are local and connected to the local community, they can assist companies in promoting cultural diversity within business contexts. How can CSO's expertise be used best, for instance, to mediate between companies and communities to address specific grievances that result from business operations?
- How to develop collaborative-based relationships, rather than based on negotiation, with CSOs treated as equal partners in the process even though there may be an inherent power disparity between them?
- How to ensure that business operations do not stir up tensions by violating economic, social and cultural rights in the first place?
- How to promote diversity, while reducing social ostracism and violence on the basis of gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity?

Participants of this breakout session may wish to consider recommendations for action based on the questions and issues of cooperation identified in the enclosed "discussion paper". Such recommendations will be considered a key outcome of this session.