

Presenting the outcome from Partnerships for Sustainable Development: the Oslo conference on good governance, and social and environmental responsibility

Mr Chairman,

Sustainable development has been on the global agenda for more than two decades, and is now reaching new levels of urgency in an era of unprecedented economic growth. The conference *Partnerships for Sustainable Development: the Oslo conference on good governance, and social and environmental responsibility* was motivated by a joint call from concerned stakeholders with great aspirations to contribute to advancing the sustainability agenda.

The conference took place in Oslo from 28 to 30 March this year, and attracted more than 800 participants from government, business, academia, trade unions and NGOs from more than 50 countries, from all regions of the world.

Allow me to share with you some of the key messages contained in the conference document, the *Oslo Agenda for Change*.

Mr Chairman,

The conference participants clearly expressed a *common sense of urgency to move forward* on issues of sustainability and CSR. A priority ahead, for governments and business alike, is to reduce poverty and ensure better protection of the environment.

The needs of the poor should be addressed in a way that promotes sustainability. And models for wealth creation should encompass both economic and social aspects, ensuring broad participation and a social safety net. Faced with the threat of climate change, business as usual is no longer an option. We all need to change our mindset.

Although much good work is being done by governments and business to meet social and environmental concerns, *serious gaps in government implementation and serious deficiencies in industrial self-regulation still remain.*

Concerted action by governments, local authorities, industry associations and corporate front runners is vital to scale up implementation and to pull hesitant companies along.

Efforts to strengthen and develop existing voluntary international CSR instruments and mechanisms must be scaled up, and wider application of existing voluntary regional and multilateral frameworks is highly encouraged.

The conference clearly stated that working in partnership is key to meeting these global challenges. Both resource depleting businesses, weak civil societies and failed governments are part of the problem, but responsible companies, engaged governments, vigilant NGOs and knowledge communities are also part of the solution.

The conference identified three main areas of unrealised potential for improving sustainability and corporate social responsibility:

- respecting human rights and decent work standards
- applying environmentally and climate-change friendly business practices
- improving transparency and securing validation

Human rights, health issues like HIV/Aids, employment and decent work need to be put on the sustainable development agenda. The protection of human rights is a moral imperative, for governments, individuals, and for companies. Governments should ratify the ILO core conventions and implement them nationally. When government implementation fails, companies should be encouraged to establish and implement corporate standards in line with the ILO core conventions.

The conference established a need for a shift towards low carbon technologies, focusing on energy efficiency and renewable energy. This should not deprive developing countries of their prospects of economic growth. Business needs predictability to make the necessary investments, and all governments should enter a new international post-Kyoto agreement.

The credibility of corporate social responsibility depends on the confidence of all stakeholders. International standards on the different aspects of CSR, combined with sound sustainability reporting and independent audits, peer review mechanisms or certification systems are excellent means of fostering discipline and continuous improvements.

Mr Chairman,

Norway believes that these key messages, expressed by a large group of experts and dedicated individuals, will serve as valuable input to our discussions on industrial development in the coming weeks.

Thank you.