



Side event de la France au HLPF 2023 – 18 juillet 2023

Discours Melissa Powell, *Chief of Staff, UNGC*

A collaborative approach at all levels: an essential lever for sustainable transformation

“Merci beaucoup, Excellencies, esteemed panelists, distinguished guests,

It is an honor to speak with you today. Thank you for inviting me to participate in this important discussion.

We cannot achieve the Sustainable Development Goals without scaling up private sector leadership and support. But how can we strengthen the business community's contribution to the 2030 Agenda before it is too late?

This is a critical part of our mission at the UN Global Compact –the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative, with over 18,000 businesses in 161 countries worldwide. With more than 60 country-level Networks in all regions of the world - it's great to see our Executive Director of our Local Network in France also present here today.

Our participating companies represent a range of sectors and industries, from multinational corporations to the small and medium enterprises that make up the backbone of local economies. In fact, more than half of our participating businesses are small and medium-sized companies from developing countries.

First - much greater awareness is needed. Some companies haven't heard of the SDGs and enlightened CEOs can play an even greater role in raising awareness and by translating their company's sustainability commitments throughout their supply chains.

Our Ten Principles on human rights, labour rights, the environment and anti-corruption provide a road map for companies of all sizes to increase their own business competitiveness, while advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. And our annual reporting requirement provides a public platform for companies to showcase their progress in relation to their commitments.

What does this look like on the ground?

It looks like restoring watersheds in Brazil and protecting labour rights in Kenya.

It looks like fighting gender discrimination in Sri Lanka and helping farmers in Ukraine rebuild their businesses, even in the midst of ongoing violent conflict.

It looks like advancing renewable energy, protecting biodiversity, fighting plastic pollution in our oceans, and so much more.

Companies are increasingly aware that to earn the trust of today's consumers, they must embrace greater accountability, integrity and transparency in their operations.

The second point I want to emphasize is that corporate commitments must be backed-up by plans for how companies will actually measure and track their progress. Measuring and tracking progress is a necessity so we know where greater effort is needed.

Our recent survey of Global Compact participating CEOs revealed that a resounding 96% of CEOs agree that the private sector has a critical role to play in achieving the Global Goals. But, of course, this is more easily said than accomplished. Navigating the rapidly evolving and increasingly complex global landscape demands a change in how businesses operate.

Challenges previously considered external – such as climate change, socio-political instability and public health crises – are now integral to corporate strategy and operations.

My final point is that we need to provide companies with the tools and guidance they need in business-friendly language to support them in their sustainability journeys. This is critical if we want to strengthen their engagement. That is why we have the Global Compact Academy for example which offers companies actionable insights and best practices, regardless of where the company is on its journey.

It's also important to provide more opportunities for cross-sectoral engagement and collaboration so companies can come together with Governments and the UN, to better understand each other's challenges and to find new opportunities for collaboration. This needs to happen more at both the global and the local level together with UN Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams.

Regarding your second question, what role can public authorities play as catalysts?

Through enabling legislation and business-friendly, yet principles-based, frameworks, governments can encourage and support greater action from the private sector as well as multi-stakeholder partnership models that will help to rescue the SDGs.

We conduct an annual survey of our participants each year and nearly half of CEOs surveyed ranked governments as the number one entity from which they need more involvement on their sustainability journeys. So this is a real opportunity for much greater engagement, understanding and collaboration.

A great opportunity for public-private collaboration towards achieving the SDGs is through the preparation of a country's Voluntary National Review. Just yesterday we organized a discussion where our Global Compact Local Networks from Chile, Saudi Arabia and Tanzania spoke alongside their Government counterparts about the value of data and insights from the private sector in their respective country's VNRs. The partnership between our French Local Network and the French Government is also an excellent example of this type of multi-stakeholder collaboration.

This September, the UN Global Compact will be launching a new initiative – the Forward Faster Campaign – to help companies further target their sustainability efforts, including through policy advocacy with Governments. Forward Faster will focus on five key areas where the business community is best equipped to advance sustainable development - living wage, climate change, gender equality, water stewardship, and sustainable finance.

Poverty, hunger and inequality are on the rise. Extreme weather events, from devastating floods to crippling droughts are threatening companies and communities worldwide. Meanwhile, the window to limit global warming is quickly closing. Our current actions fall far short.

The outlook is daunting, but the business community is uniquely positioned to do much more to help address our world's most pressing challenges. Business leaders have tremendous power to drive innovation, promote resource efficiency, advance fair labour practices and protect human rights.

When companies work together with Governments and civil society, great change is possible. It will take courageous leadership from both the public sector and the private sector to get us there.

Merci, Thank you."