



Remarks

by

H.E. John W. Ashe
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Former President Clinton,
Governor of Guangdong Province,
Former Director-General of UNIDO,
President of the Chinese People's Association of Friendship with Foreign Countries,
Executive Vice President of the China Federation of Overseas Chinese Entrepreneurs,
Honourable Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

A pleasant good afternoon to you all.

Let me say how pleased I am to be able to speak on a topic of immense importance to the international community: charting a new future in global development. I do so against this backdrop of one of China's most rapidly evolving and dynamic urban centers that is today's Guangzhou, which is fast becoming an exciting global business hub, yet faces many of the development challenges associated with urbanization.

The future in global development to which I refer is the Post 2015 Development Agenda, which is set to guide the international community toward a more sustainable and prosperous planet in the decades to come. To say this task is monumental is certainly an understatement. As I have said many times, it may, in fact, be one of the most profound undertakings of the United Nations to date.

Such a task requires collaboration from all segments of society, combining the forces of governments, international organizations, civil society, and of course, you, in our private sector. Achieving this multi-sectoral approach and buy-in is very much a challenge as we proceed. We need to overhaul all aspects of our lives: the ways in which we build, plan, work, consume, seek recreation and do business.

Distinguished Guests,

This new agenda we are in the process of developing has two agreed upon and very concrete starting points – we seek development that protects our planet and provides a sustainable home for future generations, and we seek to end extreme poverty, a goal that is within our grasp over the next decades.

With these two objectives as our compass, we are in a good place to begin narrowing down on specific targets. This is happening at United Nations Headquarters in New York right now, through a process to explore possible Sustainable Development Goals, which will build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that were adopted in 2000 and which are supposed to be fully realized by 2015. Work is also being done on identifying the financing needed for long-term sustainable development as well as on options to facilitate technology transfer. The outcomes of these three processes will feed into the intergovernmental negotiations, which will begin in September 2014, and ultimately, the plan is to adopt the new agenda in September 2015. As you can imagine, the stakes are very high and the timeline is not terribly long.

As President of the UN General Assembly, I will support these processes by convening six High-level events in the coming year that will be focused on areas that I believe are crucial for success in any development agenda. Each one of them has relevance for the business community and I would like to highlight a few connections:

1. The first event will focus on the role of women, youth and civil society: Women and young people offer great potential yet are most affected by unemployment, underemployment and income disparities. In a time of scarce resources, we cannot afford to alienate the fifty (50%) of the world's population that women comprise; nor can we neglect the talents of our youth. As business leaders, you can help create a new paradigm by drawing on the skills, talents and abilities of women, putting them in your boardrooms, and giving them more senior positions. You can also invest in our youth by increasing their employment opportunities, include them in your conversations and draw upon their creativity and capacity to innovate.

2. South-South, Triangular cooperation and ICT for Development: The dynamism of the global South continues to explode, South-South trade has more than doubled in the last three decades and the ICT sector provides great opportunities for creativity and innovation. I hope it does not come as a surprise to you to hear that China is one of the leading countries of the South when it comes to South-South cooperation. There is tremendous opportunity in how countries of the South interact, support one another and do business, especially in the field of ICT. Some of the most successful enterprises in the world began as microenterprises right in someone's home, and they have fundamentally changed the way in which our world communicates and does business.

3. Partnerships will play a central role as we further elaborate and implement the post-2015 development agenda. And as we continue to recover economic and financial crises of 2008-9, the private sector has the potential to increasingly become a source of innovative financing for development projects. At the moment, successful public-private partnerships are helping to alleviate disease burden and malnutrition, preserving forests, conserving water and facilitating mobile banking, among many others.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A few weeks ago, I was in Nairobi at the Global South-South Expo. This event showcased a wide array of initiatives that illustrated how the protection of the environment, the conservation of natural resources and the eradication of poverty are mutually reinforcing and can contribute to inclusive economic growth. It is becoming ever more apparent that promoting and investing in sustainable societies and business practices can generate long-term profits.

Through economic development, livelihoods, job creation and not to mention new products and services, the private sector has tremendous potential to benefit society. As the tide of business rises, it has the potential to bring others along with it, but as we know, this is not always the case. Mirroring our global aspirations, the business sector must look at how it can likewise become more people-centered and sustainable.

In this regard, I would like to highlight one platform where the business community can engage in the post-2015 process: the UN Global Compact. To date, eight thousand companies – more than half of them being SME's - have joined the UN Global Compact and committed to universal principles and corporate sustainability. This year, the Global Compact contributed to a seminal report issued by the UN Secretary-General, thereby including the business perspective in the post-2015 development agenda.

Among other findings, the report reminds us that in order for the private sector to succeed, no less have a positive impact in the world, companies need to operate in a supportive and enabling environment. Some other critical factors are stable macro-economic policies, supportive and reliable infrastructure, a well-educated and capable population and markets conducive to fair trade. Finally, for the small and medium enterprises, we must ensure that access to credit is available so that they can expand, thrive and create more jobs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sustainability is both a fantastic opportunity and a moral responsibility, and I think we can agree that the world benefits most when these two sides of the coin come together. Some have postulated that we are now on the cusp of a new economic revolution based on sustainability, and you, members of the private sector, the owners and employees of small and medium enterprises, you are an important part of realizing such a transformation. But beyond our professional roles, we are all consumers of goods and services, concerned citizens, and guardians of the air we breathe, the water we drink and make use of, and the forests, ecosystems and biodiversity of this earth. We are all responsible to the children of today and the generations to come. Let us make choices now that promote lives of dignity, decency, and prosperity for all and that honor our shared home. Our collective and global quest for sustainable development is simply the only path for a viable, hopeful and prosperous future.

Thank you.