

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Business Leaders to Build New Partnerships to Fight Hunger and Advance Millennium Development Goals

Historic UN Private Sector Forum Seeks to Scale up Business Solutions, Generate New Commitments for Food Sustainability and Progress on MDGs

(New York, 24 September 2008) – Chief executives representing leading corporations from all continents are meeting with government leaders and senior United Nations officials in New York today for the first UN Private Sector Forum on Food Sustainability and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Forum has been organized by the UN Global Compact and a broad coalition of UN agencies, funds and programmes in response to the global food crisis, which threatens to reverse critical gains made in reducing poverty and hunger worldwide.

Currently, 923 million people are suffering from hunger in the world. In 2007, largely as a result of the high food prices, some 75 million people were pushed into hunger and poverty. By 2030, world agricultural production will have to increase by 50 percent to feed an additional 1.6 billion people and world food production will need to double to feed 9 billion people in 2050. Private investment is crucial to boost agricultural production and rural development sustainably.

To be opened by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the Private Sector Forum will take place one day before world leaders gather at the UN to assess overall progress towards the MDGs and articulate a course of action that will seek a stronger role for the private sector in advancing sustainable development. In this context, a new guide on *Food Sustainability and the Role of the Private Sector*, compiled by the UN Global Compact Office and to be presented at the Forum, will highlight how companies from a broad range of industry sectors can have an impact on long-term food sustainability through their operations and activities.

As the primary platform for UN-business interaction on the MDGs, the Forum will mobilize corporations to step up their efforts around critical areas that directly affect access to and availability of food: water availability and management; agricultural inputs and infrastructure; financial mechanisms and risk management; nutrition; energy and biofuels; technological innovations; and; job creation for low-income populations. Key outcomes of the Forum will be taken forward in the three official roundtable sessions during the summit on 25 September.

During the Forum, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Global Compact, the UK Government, the Clinton Global Initiative and the International Business Leaders Forum, in collaboration with the World Economic Forum will launch the Global Partnership for the Business Call to Action. Companies, that sign up to the Business Call to Action will be challenged to develop specific core business initiatives and turn their signatures into concrete actions. The Partnership will track commitments companies make, assess their contribution towards meeting the MDGs, and learn lessons on what works well for both businesses and poor communities that can be replicated globally.

The Forum will also feature the launch of a new *Framework for Business Engagement with the United Nations*, which was developed to more effectively mobilize the private sector in contributing to the MDGs – particularly in the areas of greater public-private synergy, coordination, scale and impact.

The first UN Private Sector Forum is co-organized by the UN Global Compact Office, the UN Development Programme, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Global Alliance for ICT and Development of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and the UN Office for Partnerships, with additional support from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation, the UN Environment Programme, and the International Labour Organization.

Statements Attributable to Senior UN Officials

"High food prices are cancelling all global progress towards the MDG goal on hunger and reversed a declining trend. Investment in agriculture is vital to alleviate this situation before it worsens - public and private sector partnerships offer an excellent opportunity", said **Dr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization**.

"The Business Call to Action is the next natural step in our effort to catalyze, inspire and support increased private sector investments that can help achieve the MDGs," said **Kemal Derviş, UNDP Administrator**. "Meeting the challenges in our fight against poverty takes creativity. We are presenting a new approach to develop long term business initiatives that will harness the central strengths of global business - its resources and talents - to further our shared aims".

"Simply ratcheting up and expanding the economic models and strategies of the 20th century will not serve us well in the 21st one – not if we are to feed six, rising to nine billion people", said **Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP)**. "It is high time we made the link between the ecosystems and the biodiversity that underpin agriculture in the first place, from forests and soil organisms to the multi-billion dollar services provided by the world's rapidly disappearing bees. Investments in maintaining the health and the productivity of these natural assets need to be urgently addressed alongside issues such as reform of the global subsidy system".

"The food crisis is still on. Prices have dropped since the summer, but staple cereals on the global market still cost twice as much as they did two years ago", said **John Holmes, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator**. "Whether run by smallholders near the poverty line, local enterprises, or large corporations, agriculture is mainly a private sector activity. The UN is counting on business to work with us and with governments as a key partner in reinvigorating agriculture, as well as the enterprises that service and support it".

"It is increasingly evident that ICT can significantly improve the economic prospects and performance of countries at all level of development. The ICT Community can play a strategic role by their innovations creating business opportunities for poor populations and countries", said **Sha Zukang, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs**. "The partnership between the private sector, donor communities and international institutions is needed to increase the level of investment in ICT services and assure sustainable development and expand the economy. In this context, I would like to invite you to join hands with the United Nations in a

global partnership to meet the challenges of opening up a new world of opportunities for those who have been, so far, left behind, moving forward, together to a more prosperous, equitable and sustainable future for all”.

"Private sector entities such as investors, agro-processors, traders and market agents are key partners in IFAD-supported programmes in developing sustainable and innovative solutions to problems facing small holder farmers in order to accelerate rural growth and development”, said **Lennart Bage, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development**.

"WFP is working to not only fill the cup for the hungry but to make sure the cup contains the nutrition that will allow children to reach their mental and physical potential", said **Josette Sheeran, Executive Director of the World Food Programme**. "We need the private sector to bring their innovation and entrepreneurship to these critical efforts”.

“The private sector is a crucial and indispensable partner of the United Nations”, said **Georg Kell, Executive Director of the UN Global Compact**. “This first Private Sector Forum comes at the right moment. It will give the global business community an opportunity to make a lasting contribution to advancing food sustainability and achieving the Millennium Development Goals”.

"Collaboration between the UN-system and private sector entities, foundations and philanthropic organizations is essential to the success of global efforts to improve food and nutritional security”, said **Amir Dossal, Executive Director of the UN Office for Partnerships**. “Increased investment in agriculture will ensure that both public and private entities take a sustainable approach to biofuel production. We are all aware of the inherent difficulties of forging public private partnerships, but this issue is of such global and strategic significance that none of us can afford to sit on then sidelines. In short, the UN is open for business”.

Media Contacts:

Sharon Brennen-Haylock
Senior Liaison Officer , FAO Liaison Office to the UN
+1-212-963-0977, 6036
+1-646-269-0388 (mobile)
brennen-haylock@un.org

Nick Nuttall
Spokesperson, Office of the Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
+254-20 7623084
+254 (0) 733 632755 (mobile in Kenya)
+ 41 79 596 57 37 (mobile when traveling)
nick.nuttall@unep.org

Stephanie Bunker
Spokesperson and Public Information Officer, OCHA
+1-917-367-5126
+1-917-892-1679 (mobile)
bunker@un.org

Enrica Murmura
Media and Outreach, Secretariat of the Global Alliance for ICT and Development
+1-212-963-5913
murmura@un.org

Farhana Haque-Rahman
Chief, Media Relations, Special Events and Programmes
International Fund for Agricultural Development
+39 06 54592485 /2215
+39 3357374859 (mobile)
f.haquerahman@ifad.org

Bettina Luescher
Chief Spokesperson, North America, World Food Programme
+1-212-963-5196
+1-646-824-1112 (mobile)
luescher@un.org

Matthias Stausberg
Spokesperson, UN Global Compact
+1-917-367-3423
+1-917-214-1337 (mobile)
stausberg@un.org

For information on the **Business Call to Action**, please contact:

Mariana Gonzalez
UNDP Office of Communications
+1-212-906-5317
+1-914-382-1198
mariana.gonzalez@undp.org