

**Presentation by Amir Dossal
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Partnerships,
Columbia University, 18 June 2004**

UN Partnerships: Working together for a Better World

Thank you for inviting me here today to speak about partnerships. I understand many of you come from varied backgrounds with varied expertise, and I would like to share with you how to bring the strengths of diverse backgrounds together to work for the public good.

Let me start by saying public private partnerships are not new – in fact, the first such partnership recorded in this country was in 1652, when the Water Works Company of Boston began providing drinking water to citizens. And at the United Nations, we have been building partnerships for over 50 years. But as globalization and information technologies draw the peoples of the world closer, so do they knit together social, economic, political and cultural challenges. It is increasingly difficult to work in any one of these areas without considering the impact or repercussions in another. From this, a space has formed that did not exist before – a space where public private partnerships among governments, civil society, foundations and the private sector are gaining recognition as a promising approach for addressing social challenges.

I will share with you the words that the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, delivered at the 1998 World Economic Forum: “Creating wealth, which is business’s expertise, and promoting human security in the broadest sense, the

UN's main concern, are mutually reinforcing goals. Thriving markets and human security go hand in hand. A world of hunger, poverty and injustices is one in which markets, peace and freedom will never take root.”

These words are even more important in a post-September 11th world. What we witnessed on that day was not just a loss of lives from over 60 nations, but also the now inseparable links between politics and economics, between global markets and local cultures, and between public policy and private interest. Since then a complex world has become even more uncertain and the social and economic interrelationships more pronounced.

This was not always the case. Towards the end of the Cold War, the roles and responsibilities of governments, the private sector and civil society organization were well defined. However the past 15 years have seen an explosion of civil society organizations worldwide, the globalization of business, the revolutionary force of communications and information technologies - and this has changed the perspective on what governments can and should do. New networks between the public and private sectors have emerged from this revolution, re-defining - and at times clouding - the previously clear roles of government, business and civil society.

In light of these developments, private enterprise has an increasingly important role to play. Trade and technology transfer not only create business opportunities and wealth, but can also help to weave nations together. Even before September 11th global companies were being asked to think beyond the boardroom and bottom line, to act responsibly and contribute to broader societal goals. At the

same time, companies with a global reach are finding new market opportunities by engaging in the developing world.

Public private partnerships provide quality services and infrastructure on a very cost-effective basis. Yet there is concern by some that such arrangements compromise the social good of a public sector endeavor, or serve more to better the image of a private sector partners than further a wider purpose. There is a fear that the intrusion of capitalism will diminish the pursuit of a public good.

My view is that you create greater wealth when you partner; you bring more resources to the table. By remaining vigilant about who your partners are and their motivations for working together – the risk of being compromised is very small in comparison to the potential gains for good.

True public private partnerships don't allow one partner to do very little yet reap praise for its social concern. A public private partnership begins with identifying a problem or issue, then asking who should address it. This doesn't allow a narrow view from any one partner – it is a collective analysis and plan. The result is about shared agendas and combined resources, risks, and rewards. It is a situation where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

The UN and Partnerships

Partnerships are particularly important in a global world where traditional boundaries between what is seen as public versus private responsibilities have become increasingly blurred, and where problems such as AIDS and climate change extend beyond national boundaries. Hence it is not a surprise that a common agenda is emerging between the UN and the private sector. Partnering

with the UN to alleviate complex social problems such as poverty, exploitation, human rights abuses and the spread of diseases has many advantages. Partners with the UN can:

- build capacity in emerging markets,
- help promote political stability and good governance,
- battle corruption and human rights abuses,
- encourage innovation and new ways of thinking,
- improve health, education, the environment and social well-being.

In recent years the United Nations has increased its efforts to foster partnerships. My office, the UN Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP), was established in March 1998 after Ted Turner announced his gift of \$1 billion to support UN causes the year before. Turner set up a public charity called the United Nations Foundation to administer this gift. UNFIP works with Turner's UN Foundation to fund and develop programmes and to build new partnerships for the UN system.

The success of the UN's partnership with the UN Foundation has spurred a multiplier effect that has enabled UNFIP and the UN to attract and foster additional partnerships. UNFIP has been asked to facilitate and promote such new partnerships, networks and alliances with a variety of sources. A few of the corporations UNFIP works with include: Cisco Systems Inc., Citigroup, Hewlett-Packard, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Suez, and Vodafone.

Working together with a partner like UNF has helped us to **think in new and innovative ways**. They support the UN, but are not the UN, so they bring a fresh

perspective to the table. For example, a few years ago UNF and UNFIP funded the development and launch of the Global Reporting Initiative – the only existing guidelines for reporting on the economic, environmental, and social dimensions of a company’s activities, products, and services. Out of this grew more ideas and discussions that led to the November 2003 **Investors Summit on Climate Risk**. The Summit was held at the UN and convened 200 pension fund managers, US state treasurers, government officials, high level business executives, NGO leaders, and senior UN staff to explore the connection between climate risk and fiduciary responsibility. Former Vice President Al Gore was the keynote speaker and a 10 point Call to Action was signed by key participants who have fiduciary responsibility for over \$1 trillion in assets.

In the past, public/private partnerships often meant: you give us your money and we’ll spend it. Today, partnerships have taken on a whole new meaning. Partnership means truly working together – sharing intellectual and financial resources. We saw that when the Investors Summit brought together government, the UN, Wall Street and corporate board executives to talk about environmental liabilities. This is personally what I want to see more of – exploring the links between previously separate ways of thinking. **This is where innovation lies.**

UNFIP sees three levels of opportunities for partners to align socially responsible activities with UN goals:

- advocacy,
- cooperation on the ground
- strategic partnerships (leveraging each partners’ strengths).

Engaging business and all actors of civil society as part of the solution is not only the best chance, it may also be the only chance we have to reach the Millennium Development Goals.

MDGs and business

The Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs, are the blueprint for UN action in promoting development and serve as the framework for UN partnerships. In September 2000, 189 world leaders at the United Nations Millennium Summit agreed to the MDGs, a set of measurable goals and targets to be reached by 2015. The goals provide a framework of accountability and transparency by setting forth concrete targets, and also help strategically focus programs and grants. To meet these challenges the UN and its member states need the infrastructure and intellectual capital of the private sector.

Conversely, the MDGs are also important to business. There are growing international demands for companies to be more transparent and more accountable for the economic, social and environmental impact where they operate. There are three broad reasons why private industry's support of the MDGs make good business sense:

1. Investing in a sound environment in which to do business;
2. Managing the direct costs and risks of doing business;
3. Harnessing new business opportunities.

Business can make a contribution to the achievement of the MDGs through their:

- core business activities,
- social investment and philanthropic activities,

- and engagement in public policy dialogue and advocacy activities.

Global corporate citizenship

Working with the UN, particularly the **Global Compact** office, provides a framework for global corporate citizenship. In an address to The World Economic Forum in 1999, the Secretary-General challenged business leaders to join an international initiative – the Global Compact – that would bring companies together with UN agencies, labor and civil society to support **nine principles** in the areas of human rights, labor and the environment.

Through collective action, the Global Compact seeks to advance responsible corporate citizenship so that business can be part of the solution to the challenges of globalization. In this way, the private sector – in partnership with other social actors – can help realize a more sustainable and inclusive global economy.

Today, over 1,000 companies from all regions of the world, as well as international labor and civil society organizations, are engaged in the Global Compact.

Successful Partnership Building

Very often companies, foundation, NGOs or even individuals come to UNFIP seeking advice on how to engage with the UN. UNFIP views itself as a one-stop for those seeking UN partnerships as we are able to recognize where in the UN system an appropriate partner may be found. Yet there's much more to forging a successful partnership than navigating the UN system and handing over contact information. It is really about building relationships. Quick response time, thoroughness, managing expectations, an understanding of what is important to a partner as well as what is important to the UN – these are all aspects of fostering

a healthy partnership.

It is ideas, not money, which will bring successful cooperation. Money comes later when common ground has been found and partners can assist or develop a project or programme with the UN.

I don't, however, want to paint only a rosy picture. That would only be telling half the story. In many ways the partnership approach seems to be falling short. Many partnerships fail, or fail to live up to their intentions. Part of the problem that we have seen is:

- the lack of a widely shared understanding about what constitutes a true partnership; partners must have a common definition of the project at hand, even if their institutions do not share a common vision;
- managing expectations;
- the incentives of the various sectors involved;
- and how partnerships are best established, operated and evaluated.

Partnerships cannot be a patchwork quilt of well-meaning intentions and ideas sewn together. They require nurturing, compromises, re-assessment. And maybe most of all, patience. Partnership building is generally not a speedy process – but it can be a very effective and rewarding endeavor.

Partnerships in Action

Let me share with you a few examples of successful UN partnerships. One is the **Global Polio Eradication Initiative**. Launched in 1988, this global partnership - the largest public health initiative in history - works to eradicate polio. The World Health Organization (WHO) coordinates the effort, while UNICEF

provides the oral polio vaccine. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the WHO offer technical expertise while the 1.2 million members of Rotary International have raised approximately \$500 million for polio eradication and provided tens of thousands of volunteers in the field. The Initiative also includes private foundations like the **UN Foundation** and the **Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation**, national governments, the **World Bank** and other development banks, humanitarian organizations like the **International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement**, and corporate partners such as **Aventis Pasteur, De Beers, and Wyeth**.

Another example is the **First on the Ground** partnership with **Ericsson**, the Swedish telecommunications company, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. The UN-Ericsson partnership is designed as an in-kind contribution to provide and maintain effective mobile communications equipment and expertise for humanitarian relief operations.

In the environment programme area, the **Equator Initiative** is a partnership that brings together the United Nations, government, civil society, business and foundation sectors to help build the capacity and raise the profile of local enterprises in the tropics that link economic improvement and job creation with protecting the environment. The Equator Initiative demonstrates that using and conserving biological diversity are now a part of the business bottom line for these thriving local enterprises. The Initiative is a partnership of **UNDP** with **BrasilConnects**, the **Government of Canada**, **International Development Research Centre**, **The World Conservation Union**, **The Nature Conservancy**, **Television Trust for the Environment**, and the **United Nations Foundation**.

Smaller companies and organizations can also work with the UN to make a significant difference in people's lives. **Books for Africa**, a US-based non-governmental organization that collects donated text, library and reference books and ships them to Africa, has entered into a partnership with UNHCR to provide books in refugee camps on the continent. Under a pilot project, 25,000 books were shipped early June from Minnesota to Dukwe refugee camp in Botswana where Angolan, Somali and Namibian refugees are living. The transportation cost of US\$ 8,000 was covered by a grant from **USAID's Education for Development and Democracy Initiative**. Books for Africa is now seeking to secure the shipment of 400,000 books to refugee camps in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda.

Initial partnership queries from the **European Foundation Centre** led to UNFIP becoming a member of its Programme Committee. This, in turn, led the International Committee of EFC to adopt the MDGs as part of their agenda and encouraged European Foundations to do the same, particularly advocating for their greater involvement in fighting HIV/AIDS globally. The EFC included three sessions on UN-related issues at their Annual Conference earlier this month as well as had the UN Deputy Secretary-General as their keynote speaker.

Another innovative partnership facilitated by UNFIP is the **Rockefeller Foundation-led Mother-to-Child-Transmission (MTCT) Plus** initiative, which focuses on HIV/AIDS prevention linked to treatment to increase survival of both infected mothers and their infants. **UNICEF and the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric Aids Foundation**, among others, are implementing this \$100 million programme. The Mailman School of Public Health here at **Columbia University**

is leading the partnership coalition on technical and operational issues, and a coalition of eight foundations is providing sponsorship.

Conclusion

Although these new types of partnerships have much to offer, it is important to maintain realistic expectations and to be aware of the challenges to cooperation. Partners may come to a project with good intentions, but they still have individual needs and requirements that may not be easily coordinated.

After a number of years of building partnerships, the UN has learned some of the key elements needed to manage the challenges inherent in public/private partnerships. These include:

- **Establishing partnership guidelines** – in 2000 the UN published guidelines for working with the private sector.
- **Efforts to building linkages at the country level**, especially with domestic businesses and labor associations;
- **Support for multi-stakeholder dialogues**, which can play a critical role in agreeing on boundaries and expectations at the onset of an initiative;
- **Improvements to information sharing and enhanced skill building** for the UN to manage new types of cooperation with partners; consistent internal communication and coordination is a must.

Public/private partnerships require a balance of idealism and pragmatism, creative vision and managed expectations, pooled resources and a willingness to compromise. But a well executed and monitored partnership will help both business and individuals.

I would like to leave you with the words of a **Columbia graduate**, renowned anthropologist **Margaret Meade**, who truly understood the interconnections of human lives: “Never believe that a few caring people can’t change the world, for, indeed, that’s all who ever have.”

Thank you.