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OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF AGENDA 21

Letter dated 23 June 1997 from the Permanent Representative
of Germany to the United Nations addressed to the
Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you the text of the New York Declaration of the International Business Forum on Agenda 21 organized by the Carl Duisberg Gesellschaft e.V., Foundation for International Training and Development, which took place in New York from 16 to 18 June 1997 (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as an official document of the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 8.

(Signed) Tono EITEL

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ANNEX



Carl Duisberg
Gesellschaft e.V.

Foundation for
International Training
and Development

New York Declaration

of the

International Business Forum on Agenda 21

From June 16th-18th, 1997, the International Business Forum on Agenda 21 came together in New York by invitation of Carl Duisberg Gesellschaft, Cologne, (Federal Republic of Germany). Participating in the event were about 100 participants from industry, industrial associations and institutions from 24 countries and four continents. The forum was sponsored by the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development. It was a pre-session associated event of the Special Session of the United Nation's General Assembly to review and appraise the implementation of Agenda 21. The event was organized in cooperation with BDI (Federation of German Industries), INEM (International Network for Environmental Management) and ICC (International Chamber of Commerce).

Business community - partner for sustainable development

Agenda 21, which was conceived at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, links careful utilization and protection of the environment to the necessary requirements for social and economic development and thus gives an answer to some of humanity's most pressing problems. Five years later the scope of global problems has, however, become even broader. At the same time, environmental problems have increased and it has become clear that national governments alone will not be able to realize the envisaged goals leading to sustainable development. It is meanwhile understood that without the

participation of industry (i.e. large, medium-sized and small businesses) and their relevant associations, it will not be possible to implement a world-wide concept of sustainable development.

Strategies in discussion

Commercial success is a prerequisite for a high degree of both environmental protection and social responsibility and vice versa. This provides enterprises the necessary resources and incentives to be innovative.

Industry and business have made important progress since Rio, but much still remains to be done. Looking ahead, commercial enterprises have already taken on the challenge of sustainability. Necessary strategies and instruments have been developed. These were at the center of interest in the International Business Forum.

The Role of Voluntary Agreements

During the Forum, representatives from industrialized, developing, and countries in transition reported on "good and best practices" in industry and business. It was pointed out that industry will be able to make a crucial contribution to sustainable development by defining and implementing its goals in coordination with other players in the market. An effective instrument to achieve this goal is the conclusion of voluntary agreements that set out certain objectives that are to be reached by individual enterprises or branches of industry within a specified time. More than 250 such agreements exist in OECD countries in the area of climate change alone, contributing to effective and more efficient reduction in greenhouse gases, in particular in comparison to regulatory instruments or intrusive taxes. Transparency as to how the objectives of such agreements are to be achieved is important to ensure public trust and to reassure those who comply that all others are obliged to

make equivalent efforts. The specific steps to ensure such transparency will vary from one country to another, reflecting the administrative culture and social practices of the respective society. An international exchange of information on voluntary agreements and their results can provide additional important feedback to government, industry and the public alike.

The spread of good practices in industry should be nationally and internationally accelerated to reduce potential trade tensions caused by a widening gap on environmental standards. National networks linking large companies and small and medium industries can play an important role to spread practical tools to help small companies improve their environmental performance.

Voluntary agreements could extend to product stewardship - the exercise of responsibility throughout a product's life cycle, with the aim of building a flourishing economy that the planet can support without forfeiting its natural capital.

Instruments for a Sustainable Economy

Over the past years, a number of important instruments have been developed to support business efforts in favor of a sustainable economy. These instruments frequently require the creation of appropriate infrastructure (accreditation agencies and external management capabilities) by public authorities even while the instruments themselves are based on voluntary action by business. They represent the kind of cooperation between government and business that lies at the heart of sustainable development.

Codes of conduct such as Responsible Care or the Business Charter for Sustainable Development and other sector-specific instruments are recognized as valid instruments for a more sustainable economy.

The first parts of ISO 14 000 are now ready to be implemented. Participants at the Forum expected their companies to take the lead in responding to the opportunities created by this new standard. Experience over the next few years will show whether ISO 14 000 can meet the high expectations that many put in it. Close monitoring of the results should occur so as to allow continuous updating of the standards.

In Europe, the more ambitious EMAS system of environmental management is also now being tested in more than 500 enterprises. Very recently an agreement of compatibility between EMAS on the one hand and the worldwide known ISO 14.000 applications on the other hand has been reached.

Predictability and Equitable Implementation of Regulations

Government regulations will remain an important part of sustainable development. To permit business to respond constructively and with innovation to the constraints imposed by regulations it is essential that their consequences be predictable. During the Forum, many participants reported on good practices in industry. Incentives for the development of innovative approaches will be increased if government agencies are cooperative, effective and apply rules fairly.

Sustainable development requires international dialogue and cooperation

Sustainable development is an issue with global impact and - like hardly another subject - it depends on international exchange. Therefore it is of crucial importance to further the international dialogue and cooperation on questions of sustainable management at all levels, be it with political decision-makers, executive officers of firms and associations, or with opinion leaders and multipliers engaged in operational work. Industry-oriented activities by international organizations can assist in facilitating this process of international dialogue.

Practice-oriented training is a prerequisite

Sustainable management needs well-educated and professionally trained people with the capacity of developing an industrial and commercial framework founded on ecological, economic and social sustainability. It is necessary to intensify a practice-oriented advanced training of executive personnel of firms committed to environmentally sound production processes.

Capacity building for implementing future oriented changes

The capacity of finding and implementing individual solutions, rather than automatically taking over existing models, must be at the center of advanced professional training programs focusing on sustainable management. Gaining managerial qualifications is therefore an essential part of advanced training measures. The management of processes stressing sustainable development sets high standards for employees at all levels of an organization. They are required to fulfill new performance criteria and must demonstrate the ability to continuously advance their level of knowledge. Government and industry on the other hand must cooperate in providing and extending the necessary infrastructure for training programs and to make sure the acquired knowledge and qualifications are effectively and efficiently utilized.

Sustainability in a Global Economy

The participants in the Business Forum on Agenda 21 are convinced that trade liberalization and associated initiatives to further facilitate the efficient use of the world's human and physical resources are essential to achieving sustainability. Trade in a rules-based system is an efficient element for advancing the development goals of developing countries. Trade instruments should be used with caution to promote environmental management.

At the same time the participants recognize that global markets require global rules to ensure that essential market disciplines are respected. Fundamental criteria for sustainability are as important to the functioning of modern markets as true measure, good currency or reliable contracts.

Cooperation between Government, Business and Civil Society

All societal groups, government, non-governmental organizations, consumers, labor unions and the business world must contribute to sustainable development. They will have to integrate their own values and experiences into this process. Ultimately, sustainable development can only be achieved if all stakeholders are prepared to play their role. Each sector should focus on what it does best. Sectoral, national, and international networking will lead to developing individual advantages and abilities. In this sense the participants of the International Business Forum understand themselves to be an international learning community on their way to achieving sustainable economies which will need increasing support in the future: By creating new or supporting existing networks, through enhanced cooperation in the field of management and technology, and the exchange of experience and information.

5 years after Rio AGENDA 21 still serves as guidelines in a global setting. Examples of best practices are needed to demonstrate the implementation towards these goals.

New York, June 18th, 1997
