

UN notes growth of good corporate citizenship among Asia-Pacific enterprises

Social responsibility must be truly integrated into business practices, ESCAP chief says

Bangkok (UN/ESCAP Information Services) -- Although more companies in Asia and the Pacific are taking into account such issues as environmental and social concerns there needs to be a sustained effort to ensure that corporate social responsibility (CSR) is integrated into the operations of all businesses, according to a pair of meetings organized by the regional arm of the United Nations.

The meetings were part of the activities for the first Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Week at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

More than 200 participants at the “Regional Conference on Corporate Responsibility: Why Responsible Business Conduct Matters” – co-organized with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – agreed that the time had come to develop a common positive agenda on responsible business conduct.

Drawing on lessons from the financial and economic crises and the surrounding discussion on climate change, participants concluded that the issue was no longer whether responsible business conduct made sense but how to ensure that the private sector could be most effectively harnessed to drive long-term economic growth, environmental sustainability and social progress.

In discussing the major challenges in implementing CSR across the region, Noeleen Heyzer, UN Under-Secretary-General and ESCAP Executive Secretary, noted that often companies will engage in activities that made for good public relations but had little lasting effect.

“[We need] to make sure that we move from that kind of a ‘showcase’ and ensure that corporate social responsibility is integral to business practices, something that will run through the whole production process,” she stressed.

Echoing Dr. Heyzer, the Vice Minister of Social Development and Human Security of Thailand, Nuanpan Lamsam, said the standards set by corporate social responsibility did not guarantee their success unless government, business and their investors and civil society worked together to fully put the principles into practice.

At the second meeting, representatives from the private sector, governmental officials, Global Compact Local Networks and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) discussed building an online community of practice which would allow seamless information exchange among CSR practitioners in the region.

The participants, drawn from 16 countries in Asia and the Pacific, identified various success factors, such as a sector-specific approach, establishment of effective public-

Headquartered in Bangkok, ESCAP is the largest of the UN's five Regional Commissions in terms of its membership, population served and area covered. The only intergovernmental forum covering the entire Asia-Pacific region, ESCAP works to promote sustainable and inclusive economic and social progress. More information is available at www.unescap.org.

private partnerships, including all stakeholders and increased focus on small- and medium-sized enterprises.

Other events during Trade and Investment Week feature the first session of ESCAP's Committee on Trade and Investment – the Secretary-General of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Supachai Panitchpakdi, is scheduled to deliver a keynote address Thursday to the Committee – as well as the Asia-Pacific Trade Economists' Conference and other workshops.

For further information, please visit the website <<http://www.unescap.org/tid/tiweek.asp>> or contact:

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