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HONORARY CO-CHAIRS: GEORGE F. RUSSELL, JR. AND JOHN C. WHITEHEAD

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BHF Co-hosts Joint Forum with Conference Board Europe

On February 7 and 8, the BHF hosted a joint Forum meeting with the Conference Board Europe's Council on Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability on the subject of "Company Responsibilities in Countries with Human Rights Challenges." The Forum was co-chaired by BHF



President John Maresca and by Dr. Lothar Meinzer, Chair of the European Council. The Forum brought together over 40 business people, academics, UN and NGO representatives and officials of public sector organizations to explore how companies operating in problematic areas can better fulfill their responsibilities and avoid charges of complicity in human rights abuses. Case studies were examined concerning company activities in Sudan (Lundin), Myanmar (Total and Unocal) and Colombia (Chiquita).



From l. to r.: Mr. Akala, Living Earth Foundation; Mr. Wong, Shell International; Prof. Palazzo, Univ. of Lausanne

Discussions revealed the many difficulties companies have in adapting to political conditions that their business operations were not prepared to deal with. Company speakers described the CSR work they did while NGO respondents criticized the companies for not doing enough and for indirectly strengthening regimes abusing human rights. These discussions were conducted against the backdrop of the report on Business and Human Rights prepared by Prof. John Ruggie, the UN Secretary General's special representative on this topic.

A follow-on joint Forum will be held in October, after publication in June of Prof. Ruggie's final report. A report of the February meeting will shortly be available in the documentation section of the BHF website, www.bhforum.org.

BHF Organizes Business-to-Business Meeting in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The BHF, working with USAID and Strik Consulting in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the Swiss Import Promotion Programme in Switzerland, organized a one-day Business-to-Business event, held in Sarajevo on March 13. The meeting brought together a number of BiH wood processing companies and agents with European counterparts providing an excellent opportunity to forge trade and other business partnerships. The wood processing industry in BiH is one of the most promising sectors to help the economic development in the country.

BHF Project Manager Rob Dotta co-organized and attended the meeting. He also met with representatives of the University of Zenica, where the BHF is working with university officials and experts from the University of Berne to set up a training center for the wood products industry. A business plan has already been completed and the University, with BHF help, is seeking financing to buy the machinery for the training center with the objective of beginning work in early 2009.



Panel of the B2B Meeting in Sarajevo

ECOSOC Consultative Status to Be Granted to the BHF

The BHF was notified in March by the United Nations NGO Committee in New York that it has been recommended for official ECOSOC consultative status. Such status will provide the BHF with the official basis to maintain continuous direct contact with UN agencies working in the economic development and recovery sphere. The BHF will be able to submit papers, attend meetings and provide advice to these agencies on issues related to BHF interests. The BHF's consultative status will be formally granted during ECOSOC's annual meeting in Geneva in July.

Workshop on Public-Private Partnerships to Be Held in Amman, Jordan

The third in a series of BHF workshops on building public-private partnerships is scheduled to be held in Amman, Jordan, on May 25-27. Hosted by UNDP Iraq's office in Amman, the workshop will focus specifically on economic reconstruction in Iraq and in the local region in general. Up to 35 participants from the Iraqi business sector, international financial institutions and public sector development organizations will attend the workshop, which will be followed by a round-table on developing water and electrical resources in Iraq.

The workshop will be opened by UNDP Iraq Director Paolo Lembo and BHF President John Maresca. Introductory remarks will be given by former Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, Amb. Mohamed Sahnoun.

The BHF will coordinate the workshop together with the UN-mandated University for Peace and the U.S. Institute of Peace, its partners for the previous workshops. The utility of forming public-private partnerships as a way to expedite economic reconstruction will be discussed and methodologies reviewed. A practical exercise will allow participants to develop skills and determine problem areas in forming such partnerships. Previous workshops on this subject have been held in Geneva (Sept 2006) and New York City (June 2007).

BHF Staff News

BHF Project Manager Rob Dotta gave a much-noticed presentation on the role of the private sector in poverty alleviation during the opening event of the Aid and Trade Conference, held at the end of January in Geneva. Mr. Dotta participated in the panel on harnessing globalization along with Dr. Supachai Panitchpadki, Secretary-General of UNCTAD and Mr. Dunnett, President of International Health Partners.

Mr. Dotta also participated at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy's Global Journalism Network Seminary early April. He spoke at a panel on "Understanding peacekeeping, Peacebuilding and Security" along with academic, UN and NGO experts.

Project Manager Solange Guye has departed the BHF. We wish her well in her new work at IDEAS Centre in Geneva!