

## **Building Partnerships for Humanitarian Relief**

Keynote Address By Ambassador John J. Maresca President  
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*Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen, and may I thank Toby Middleton for the introduction.*

At the outset I should specify that although I carry the title of Ambassador, I separated from the US Government more than ten years ago, so I do not have any official position, and I speak on an entirely personal basis. I am President of the Business Humanitarian Forum Association, based here in Geneva. Our organization has been associated with these Aid and Trade events often in the past, because we believe they bring together a number of different elements of our societies that have an interest in humanitarian relief and economic development. We believe these meetings are useful opportunities for exchange of ideas and brainstorming on new possibilities, to the general benefit of humanitarian work.

My own organization set as its objective from its foundation to bring about greater and more positive dialogue between the business and humanitarian communities, to promote cooperation and to find new ways to engage the resources, the creativity and the energy of the private sector in humanitarian and development work. So for us this is another useful opportunity to develop such partnerships.

My role this morning is to set some overarching themes for the discussions that will take place today and tomorrow. If there is time, I would also like to open the floor to some discussion this morning, and will welcome whatever questions or comments we have time for.

I will not be talking here about procurement. Companies produce products, and their business is to sell those products. Organizations use products and so they

sometimes are clients and buyers. Procurement by public interest organizations must be honest and transparent, and there are rules about that, but that is not the subject of my presentation. What I am talking about are the broader issues of humanitarian assistance and development. And how, with imagination and innovation, and using all the available abilities and assets, public interest organizations and private sector institutions and companies can respond more effectively to the World's most urgent needs.

And in the last few years there has been increasing recognition that public-private partnerships are useful for achieving humanitarian and development goals. Most recently the United Nations, in designing its new Peacebuilding Commission, has recognized the need to work with the private sector, including civil society, NGOs and the business community, particularly in post-conflict reconstruction situations. This kind of cooperation, coordination, or at least mutual information and understanding, is of basic importance in post-conflict situations, because that is where the international community must work together to ensure a speedy return to stability and prosperity.

And I think it is well also to note that the private sector is increasingly attune to the expectations that the world community has about the way it works, the standards that it adheres -- or aspires -- to, and the positive contributions it makes to world progress. This has been shown in numerous ways, such as the Global Compact, which now has at least 600 major companies signed up. Last year the private sector was also in the forefront in response to the tragic tsunami in Southeast Asia, contributing not only cash and useful products, but also its expertise and its unique abilities in such fields as logistics. Many representatives of the private sector were active on the ground in response to that disaster.

Of course, humanitarian relief is just a stop-gap following natural or man-made disasters, and the much bigger challenges come under the heading of economic development, as laid out in the Millennium Development Goals -- the MDGs -- which are now the over-arching challenge in the field of human development. I think we are very fortunate that the UN was able to formulate these goals. It is important for the human race to have such collective goals, and only the United Nations has been able to formulate them. At the same time, I must say that as time moves forward it seems increasingly unlikely that we will be able to achieve these goals, in the time frame that has been set.

The simple facts are that the humanitarian problems cited in the MDGs -- poverty, pollution, disease, lack of education, etc. -- are growing, while the resources available to master these problems are shrinking, in real terms. And there is very little likelihood that additional public resources will be allocated for this effort. Taxpayers are not going to accept the kinds of major increases in their taxes that would be required to meet the goals that have been formulated. But this should not discourage us; rather, it should prompt us to re-double our efforts. Those of us who are concerned with humanitarian problems and development should be racking our brains to discover new approaches, new devices, new methodologies for addressing these problems. Otherwise, the world's efforts to overcome these problems, and to reach the MDGs, will fail.

The private sector certainly has a major role to play in this equation. The private sector has vast resources -- it creates more than a trillion dollars in new wealth every year, and more than half of the world's biggest economies are companies. It has endless creativity -- all the new products we use, which make our efforts more efficient and effective, from portable phones and lap-tops to the boots we wear on mission, come from the private sector. And it has the energy and drive to accomplish things, perhaps represented best in our time by the extraordinary

development of information technologies. This is why the idea of trying to harness these qualities of the private sector, to address the world's humanitarian and development problems, is so attractive.

More than anything else, the private sector is the key to making jobs available, and if you give a head of household ? whether a man or a woman ? a job, they can usually take care of most of their other problems.

But there are important practical obstacles to engaging the private sector to reach public goals. The private sector has its own priorities, and pursues its own objectives. Its language and pace of work are different from those of the public sector or NGO's. And it will not work against its own objectives, meaning its very precise business objectives, which differ from company to company. Should these obstacles deter us from trying to engage the private sector? Not at all. But in seeking the support and cooperation of the private sector we must take them into account, understand their implications, and find ways to overcome them positively.

Above all, we need to facilitate the efforts of local entrepreneurs, who are the most important factor in economic development. This can be done in many ways, for example by attracting equity investors to join with local businesspeople to create small and mid-sized companies, which these are the types of businesses that offer the most jobs. To do this we need to understand which business sectors will work in each country, we need to see which companies can help in the creation of such businesses, and we need to find ways to help potential partners to get together and develop workable projects.

This is why events such as this Aid and Trade meeting are so important. They permit all of us who are concerned with these problems to dialogue together, to think through the challenges we face in each region, and hopefully to come up with

new and innovative ways to approach these issues together, building on the assets of organizations that serve both the public interest, as well as those that serve private interests. It is from this kind of dialogue and mutual respect that cooperative efforts can emerge. And it is just such cooperative efforts that will boost our work to achieve the MDGs.

I have been a diplomat, and have worked with many international organizations, including UN organizations, on the basis of public interest goals. I've also been a senior business executive in one of the most criticized business sectors ? the energy sector. And now I am trying to bring together both of these groups for cooperative efforts. What I have observed is that often the private sector and the public interest sector are working in the same regions, both trying in their own way to improve the situation, but not cooperating or even talking to one another. This is because on each side there is a feeling that the other side is irrelevant, of marginal utility, and would probably just get in the way. Whereas the truth is that the two components, if they were working together pragmatically, could accomplish a sum which would be greater than the parts.

I look forward to meeting many of you during this event, and to working in cooperation with some of you on joint projects. The potential of public-private cooperation is enormous, and the time to start making positive use of that potential is now.

*Thank you and welcome again to this Aid and Trade event.*