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# Defining New Cooperation in the Humanitarian Agenda

*message from*

*Kofi Annan*

*United Nations Secretary General*

*delivered on his behalf by*

*Ms. Catherine O'Neill*

*Director, UN Information Centre*

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*On November 1 and 2, CSIS co-hosted a conference with the Business Humanitarian Forum Association on [Defining New Cooperation in the Humanitarian Agenda](#). The following is a message delivered by Ms. Catherine O'Neill on behalf of the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan.*

It gives me great pleasure to convey my greetings and best wishes to all who have gathered for this conference. The Business Humanitarian Forum and the Center for Strategic and International Studies merit our recognition of this timely and important initiative.

The humanitarian work carried out by the United Nations and its many partners has come under unprecedented stress in recent years. From Africa to the Balkans and East Timor, civilians have become the preferred targets of combatants and breaches of human rights and humanitarian law have become almost routine means to an end. Humanitarian assistance is used as a palliative, when what is truly needed is political will to address the root causes of conflict. And all along there has been a woeful shortage of resources.

The consequences have been dire: needless suffering, prolonged crises and damage to the credibility of international institutions -- indeed, to the very idea of an international community. The only silver lining, if there can be said to be one, is that we have learned important lessons about the need to close the gap between emergency assistance and post-conflict development; about never losing sight of the fundamental links between poverty, development and peace; and about the necessity of forging a new consensus on how the United Nations can best respond to the political, human rights and humanitarian crises that afflict our world.

Partnerships between the United Nations and the private sector can play a key role in addressing these challenges. In the short term, in countries torn by strife, famine or natural disaster, there are the obvious business opportunities of rehabilitation, reconstruction and investment. But the broader, long-term picture is equally crucial, so that countries can avoid marginalization and the descent into chaos and instead find the path of development and integration with the global economy.

It is with this goal in mind that I have sought closer ties with the business community across the breadth of the United Nations agenda. And that is why, earlier this year, at the World Economics Forum in Davos, I proposed a Global Compact between the United Nations and the world

business community to protect human right, the environment and labor standards. Why are these the business of business? Because with global power comes global responsibility. Because a company's reputation depends more and more on satisfying not only its shareholders, but the wider global public as well. Because protecting the environment, human rights and labour rights makes good business sense. And because these are issues with global dimensions, not addressed by markets nor captured on balance sheets, yet crucial to the future well-being of us all, business included.

As we enter a new millennium, business and the United Nations have a common interest in peace and stability and in meeting the needs of the world's people. Our doors are open to all who believe in the UN's universal values and want to find common ground for the common good. To all of you who are now joined in dialogue on how to make this a reality, please accept my best wishes for a successful conference.