

BCUN Hosts “2013 at the United Nations”

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“The business community is one of our strongest allies” -Robert Orr



Dr. Robert Orr, Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Planning, United Nations

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The role of the private sector in tackling the world’s most intractable issues is fundamental, and never before has the promise of strategic partnerships between the business community and the UN been more salient than today. This was the overarching message from the meeting “2013 at the United Nations” which was hosted by BCUN on January 29th in New York. About 70 leaders from the business sector, permanent missions, and UN offices heard the perspectives of two experts on the this year’s foremost issues: **Dr. Robert Orr**, Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Planning at the Executive Office of the UN Secretary-General, and **H.E. Mr. Luis Alfonso de Alba Góngora**, Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations.

Orr praised the advances in business and UN relations of the past fifty years. He stated, “The desire to engage is very strong and it is global. That presents us with huge opportunities and also some challenges for how to structure what is the first chance we have for building UN-business partnerships at scale.” To achieve UN mandates at scale, the perceived delinkage between geopolitical and economic agendas must be overcome. Multisectoral cooperation is possible and promising, Orr explained while referencing the *Every Woman Every Child* movement, which has brought together multiple sectors around the Secretary-General’s *Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health* and led to \$20 billion committed in its first two years. Such a multistakeholder coalition must be extended to other priorities, including food and nutrition given huge market interest in food vulnerability, and sustainable energy given interest in access, renewables, and efficiency. The business community, Orr noted, has built momentum behind the need to address climate change and it is therefore essential that the UN reach a global climate change agreement by 2015 to provide a better framework for businesses investment.

Ambassador de Alba called for multilateral partnerships to deliver on the year’s coming challenges and institutional changes. Primarily, he explained, the UN and businesses must define their unique roles. With the historical universality of the UN and democratic values that inspired it, the UN is well-poised to convene

diverse partners. Given that today's challenges involve such a multitude of actors including the private sector, the comparative advantage of each institution must be defined. The ambassador outlined priority UN



H.E. Mr. Luis-Alfonso de Alba Góngora, Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations

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processes, including the post-2015 development agenda, the sustainable development goals (SDGs), and the financing of these frameworks. De Alba also highlighted ECOSOC reform, urging a better understanding of the complementarity between the General Assembly and ECOSOC and openness in ECOSOC to the participation of outside stakeholders.

By having speakers from both the Secretary-General's office and a member state mission, Francois Xavier Chevalleriau of **PwC** noted the event provided central, yet distinctive perspectives. In response to a question from Grace Lin Xu, vice president and global relationships lead at **DSM Nutritional**, on how the private sector can design social engagement programs that maintain a sustainable business model, both Orr and de Alba emphasized long-term, multistakeholder partnerships that recognize the overlap between bottom lines as defined by business and as defined by the UN. Xu expressed the need for education programs to enhance the business potential of developing countries. Citing the Secretary-General's launch of the *Education First* movement, Orr noted that there should be synergistic feedback between business and the UN so that the private sector can recognize its role in this issue. When asked about the priorities outlined during the discussion, Frederick Hawkins of the **US Mission to the UN** expressed interest in the role of the private sector also being defined for peace and security issues that are normally reserved for discussion on the geopolitical and not the economic agenda. Managing director at **BNY Mellon** John Buckley asked about how business can monitor for human rights to ensure socially-responsible investments. Institutions, de Alba stated, must be built that prevent human rights violations. Particularly with the human rights discussion no longer limited to political and civil rights, but extending to economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights, the private sector has much opportunity to get involved.

The evening concluded with a consideration of the UN not only in the coming year, but in the coming two decades. When asked by Elizabeth Enloe to predict the role of the UN in the next twenty years, both speakers responded that the UN remains a convening body that sets institutional norms. The global context in which the UN is working has changed radically, and it is no longer a place for governments to sort out their differences, but rather a place for multisectoral coalitions to come together and solve the world's problems. There is no other place to bring much needed changes to scale, and partnerships between the business community and UN can truly help drive forward the priority issues of both sectors that 2013 will bring. Special guests at the meeting included Richard Munger,



John Buckley, BNY Mellon

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Allison MacEachron, Director, BCUN; Richard Munger, BCUN co-founder; Elizabeth Enloe; Margaret Enloe, PwC

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BCUN advances the common interest of the UN and the business community working toward a healthier, prosperous and secure world. BCUN provides members with unique opportunities to engage with the United Nations and its extended network of organizations and country representatives working in areas of interest to them and their companies. For over five decades, members have counted on BCUN to serve as their essential link to the United Nations.



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