

UNGC Leaders Summit 2010

CSR LEBANON: WHERE DO WE STAND?

From The Editor

A critical moment in history indeed!

With more than 1,200 corporate executives, Government ministers, civil society leaders and other participants vowing at The Global Compact Leaders Summit 2010 last June to step up their efforts for building a sustainable and inclusive global economy, this is undeniably a new significant milestone in the history of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability worldwide.

As the largest-ever UN-business event on the issue of corporate responsibility, the overwhelming attendance at the summit particularly shows the growing interest of world business leaders in setting the tone inside their corporations for a future built on strategic and effective involvement in the community and stakeholder-based engagement policies, which is critical for determining companies' responsible behavior and long term business sustainability.

Where Was Lebanon?

Amidst leaders' call to an increased participation in the United National Global Compact (UNGC) initiative to an ambitious number of 20,000 participants by 2020, up from 8,000 today, the absence of Lebanese representation was remarkably low at the Summit; CSR LEBANON was the only Lebanese company there, showing its dedication to CSR. The reason we say "extremely remarkable" is because our neighboring and regional countries were better present and even praised at the event for having the highest growth rate of participation in this global initiative.

Presence From Our Region

Not surprisingly, presence from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region was notably shy, to say the least, with countries including Egypt (10 participants), Saudi Arabia (3), Syria (8), Jordan (4), Qatar (3), United Arab Emirates (7), Iraq (2), Turkey (4), Morocco (3), and Israel (6). This may come from the fact that the understanding of the notion of CSR is still not mature enough in the region, or is still in its infancy stage as some might argue. From another point of view, this can be the result of an

undervalued perception of the strategic benefits generated by CSR to businesses, regardless of the industry or sector.

Still affected by the consequences of the recent global economic downturn, leaders in our region are acting drastically cautious when making decisions, avoiding the fact that responsible corporate behavior not only consists a defensive shield to a company's good reputation, the first to be lost in such severe crisis, but is also a strategic approach providing corporations with an additional competitive edge in times of recovery.



Why Lagging Behind?

In Lebanon, which is considered to be one of the so-called advanced countries in the region when it comes to education, culture, and business innovations, a lack of awareness could be the most essential challenge which CSR LEBANON is trying to cope with, considering that many corporations are working on tackling various social issues each from its own perspective. The fact that Lebanon is a multicultural and multi-religious country, is supposed to provide a significant richness to its cultural profile. However, it has been to the contrary, this has only been consisting of a negative factor across history leading to successive wars and wealth destruction.

However, a serious consideration of corporate social responsibility both by the government and the private sector, would definitely lead to the emergence of the mega-community, a model that Lebanon urgently needs to be capable to catch other regional peers.