



## **Children's Rights and Business Principles National Release for Serbia – 7 June 2012, Belgrade**

Children's rights must be respected everywhere and always, and the business sector has a special responsibility to integrate them in all its business policies and practices, as well as to promote them through their cooperation with partners. This is one of the conclusions from the conference "Children's Rights and Business Principles" organised by UNICEF, UN Global Compact for Serbia and in agreement with Save the Children on 7 June in Belgrade, in order to present and analyse the above-mentioned document.

The conference was held in the Serbian Chamber of Commerce in Belgrade – attended by more than 50 representatives primarily from different business industries, but also from the civil sector and governmental institutions – was an opportunity to introduce the Principles and engage the participants in discussion on its implementation. Key UNICEF Serbia partners attended the event and also featured as speakers.

Leading Serbian TV journalist, Zoran Stanojevic chaired the national release of the Principles.

In her opening speech, Lesley Miller, UNICEF Deputy Representative welcomed the participants and recalled that it had been a year since we last met and actively contributed to the formulation of these Principles. "They are the first step of a very long journey. They will make it possible for us to analyse our work, and inspire us to make further progress", said Lesley Miller. She emphasised the main aim of the Principles in defining the scope of corporate responsibility towards children. Ms. Miller highlighted critical issues affecting children in Serbia, referring to recent research conducted by UNICEF and the Republican Statistical Office which reveals serious challenges in early childhood nutrition, development and learning, particularly for the most marginalized children.

Ms. Miller praised the numerous examples of good business practice, and announced that, together with its partners, UNICEF is preparing a workbook on the application of the Principles in practice.

Paul Hohnen, International expert on corporate responsibility and key resource person for the conference delivered the opening keynote address on the Principles. Speaking about link between children's human rights and sustainable development, Mr. Hohnen said that children represent one third of the global population, but also 100 percent of future consumers and investors. Embedding sustainability is a "mega-trend" and a challenge for business everywhere and CRBP can play an

invaluable role, Mr. Hohnen said. The Principles have several main values for business. They are **consistent** in summarizing existing laws and standards, **convenient**, as they include all key issues in one place, **compassionate** in representing link to primary human drivers, and they have **common language**, which is basis for shared action agenda. He underlined that all businesses should respect children's human rights and use their leverage to promote them.

After the introductions, which included a representative of the UN Global Compact for Serbia, the conference was organized into four key panels – Principles in Practice, Children's Rights in the Workplace, Marketplace, Community and Environment. The panels involved corporate responsibility experts and business leaders and in one case a state actor – the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality.

During the panels, the principles were presented individually, and the business sector representatives discussed the achievements and challenges encountered in their implementation. Special attention was given to the examples of good practice in the companies Telenor, Represent Communications, Metalac, Komercijalna banka, Coca-Cola, Telekom, Ikea, and Delhaize. In addition, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality brought important knowledge and experience with regard to the implementation of the national legal and policy frame on issues such as non-discrimination, child labour and family-friendly workplace policies.

The participants confirmed their support for the Principles and interest in further engagement in child rights issues within their business operations.

### **Key discussion points at the release event:**

- The Principles were recognized as an excellent framework within which any company can create and control its business activities and cooperation with its partners and the community. They provide clear guidance on how business can better respect and promote children's rights and in doing so, address sustainable development.
- The presentation of the local company Metalac provided a very inspirational example of an integrated approach to responsible business standards. This sustainable approach involves workplace policies, community activism, product positioning and employee engagement. The participants agreed that this represents a model of good practice where the Principles are integrated in the whole business operation.
- There was consensus that companies must have a proactive role in the protection of children's rights, not only through their basic activities and campaigns they organise, but also through the contractual obligations signed with all employees, partners, and suppliers.
- Throughout the discussions there was a focus on the challenge of implementing Principle 3 – provision of decent work for parents and caregivers. It was stressed that the degree to which

children's rights are exercised is directly linked with the exercise of their parents's rights in the workplace.

Therefore, greater attention must be paid to discrimination against mothers and women when hiring and to attitudes towards employees' parental responsibilities.

- The issue of business's role in ensuring child rights-respecting product placement and retail was also discussed. It was noted that those companies with a shop front business model where children are in direct contact as clients or potential clients, should be encouraged to ensure child protection policies are in place with adequate training for front-line staff.
- The protection of children's rights in advertising was recognized as another important challenge, and one where we still witness numerous violations in Serbia. Present at the conference was a representative of the International Association of Advertising, which is working on the preparation of a new code on advertising. The Association encouraged UNICEF and others to provide comments on the draft codex on marketing communications and advertising in line with the Principle 6 of the CRBPs.



