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Annan launches new UN-private sector alliance to fight poverty,

AIDS, illiteracy

Tehran, July 27, IRNA -- Calling it a task of 'crucial importance', United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan last Friday launched a new partnership with the global private sector aimed at achieving targets set at the 2000 Millennium Summit to halve extreme poverty, halt the spread of HIV/AIDS and provide universal primary education by 2015, said a press release issued by the United Nations Information Center here on Sunday.

"We cannot reach these goals without support from the private sector," Annan said as he introduced the co-chairs of the Commission on the Private Sector and Development, former President Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico and former Finance Minister Paul Martin of Canada, at UN Headquarters in New York.

"Most of all, we cannot reach them without a strong private sector in the developing countries themselves, to create jobs and build prosperity," he added of the new body, an initiative of the UN Development Program (UNDP). "I very much hope that this Commission will provide both a fresh analysis of these issues and practical proposals that can have an impact on the ground."

He said the birth of the Commission was 'yet another illustration of the rapidly growing partnership between the United Nations and the private sector' and underscored the importance of that partnership 'in our work to reach the Millennium Development for building a better world in the 21st century'.

He noted that UNDP had taken the Global Compact -- the UN's corporate citizenship initiative bringing together companies, governments, UN agencies, labor and civil society to foster action in support of universal values -- to many countries around the world, inspiring dialogue, learning and projects.

Several concrete initiatives are already taking shape.

UNDP has also launched strategic project partnerships and ambitious initiatives such as 'Growing Sustainable Business in the Least Developed Countries', he said.

"I hope that the Commission will build on these and other successful approaches, identifying how successful ones can be scaled up, and how business in partnership with other actors can bring about positive change," Annan declared.

"There is much to be done, and it is of crucial importance that we move forward. A large part of the work for development, after all, is about preparing the ground for sufficient private sector activity to provide jobs and income needed to build a more equitable and prosperous society. I very much hope that this Commission will make a difference in that mission," he concluded.

UNDP Administrator Mark Malloch Brown said the reason he had approached the secretary general with the proposal to form the Commission resulted from a trip to Africa. That trip had confirmed what he had observed on many other field trips: despite the many real successes of development, a strategy of economic diversification and the development of a small and medium sized business sector was missing at the center.

The 'pillar' was not there. The issue of building a private sector in developing countries was the critical next challenge in development. "It is the great mountain we need to climb together in this area," Malloch Brown declared.

The Commission would deliberately have a short writing period so that it could focus on a very 'un-commission' -- like second phase, namely a pilot phase where the Commission's ideas would be tried out in the field, he added.

Asked by reporters how the Commission would engage the private sector in developing countries, Martin said the small- and medium-size business sector was the most dynamic 'big business' sector of any country. Enormous amounts of initiative come from the small- and medium- sized business sector and the Commission wanted to engage people in that sector, he added.

For his part, Zedillo was asked what kind of results the Commission planned to deliver by the end of the year. The Commission's mandate was very clear, he replied, and he would be happy if the Commission's report clearly put forward the best ideas to foster the domestic private sector in poor countries. What had been done in rich, developed countries could not mechanically be repeated and the particular characteristics of developing countries would have to be taken into account.

"There is no such thing as a silver bullet for development,"

Zedillo said.

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