

## Press Release

### **Companies unveil new business initiatives in the fight to decrease global poverty**

#### **The UK Government and the United Nations challenge the Private Sector to apply core business skills to enhance economic growth**

*London, 6 May 2008*—Joining the Business Call to Action, a dozen companies today announced concrete initiatives that apply core business expertise, utilizing their technology and innovative spirit to tackle the multiple challenges of poverty.

The announcements were made at the Business Call to Action event, hosted by UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Kemal Derviş, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and with the participation of more than 80 global business leaders who came to London to showcase innovative and creative initiatives to reduce poverty in the developing world.

President Paul Kagame of Rwanda and President John Kufuor of Ghana were also present at the event.

Over the next five years, these new business initiatives, announced by Diageo, Vodafone, Coca Cola, Sumitomo Chemical, Microsoft, SABMiller, Thomson Reuters, Citi and Cisco are expected to create thousands of jobs, and potentially improve the lives of millions of poor people across Africa and Asia. They are part of a concerted push to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that will enable poor people to access speedy flows of information, money and business expertise as well as creating new employment opportunities.

“In the race to achieve the MDGs, one of the greatest untapped resources is the private sector, said Mr. Derviş. Businesses are engines of growth and sustainable development.

“Innovative business leaders, both in the North and the South, are changing the way that many businesses operate. They are expanding beyond traditional business practices, to also focus on the needs of those locked out of the global market, bringing them in as partners in growth and wealth creation. Such creative approaches and partnerships are essential in catalysing vibrant new markets that can contribute to advancing inclusive growth and development.”

He added that “the Business Call to Action is not a one off event, but a commitment to speed up progress on the MDGs, to create a prosperous world for all.” In that spirit, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, will convene, in September, a high-level meeting on the MDGs, bringing together world leaders, civil society and the private sector to help translate existing commitments into action and bolster the global partnership for development.”

At the UN in July 2007, the Prime Minister made a Call to Action to governments, businesses, NGOs and faith-based groups to focus resources and effort on delivering the MDGs by 2015, recognising that, without a collective drive, these goals will not be met. Some of the world’s leading companies signed up for the Call to Action, and this event is the next step in that process.

“Africa and other parts of the developing world offer a wealth of business opportunities that make real commercial sense,” said Douglas Alexander, UK Secretary of State for International Development. “Today we are calling on companies to make concrete commitments to develop their business in the developing world, and to speed up action that they have already planned. Long term economic growth is a vital part of the fight against global poverty. Although we are over halfway towards the Millennium Development Goal target date of 2015, we are not halfway to meeting the MDGs. It is time to take concerted action to save lives and business has a key role to play in the push against poverty.”

“I am delighted that some of the world’s biggest companies have developed initiatives after signing up to the Call to Action last year in New York,” he added speaking at the event in London. “I am hopeful that after today’s event businesses will be inspired to do more and have a greater understanding of the life changing impact that they can have in the developing world, and of the opportunities open to businesses who invest there.”

The Business Call to Action is not about philanthropy. It challenges companies to use their core business —whether it be manufacturing, finance or telecommunications— in a way that contributes both to sustainable development and to their own commercial success. It aims to inspire CEOs and companies to realise that reducing poverty also makes good business sense. By addressing poverty, businesses are not only building a safer and more prosperous world, but also securing future commercial success.

It’s been just over seven years since 189 world leaders endorsed the MDGs. The Goals represent a global partnership to promote poverty reduction, education, maternal health, gender equality, and aim at combating child mortality, AIDS and other diseases. More than halfway to the target year, the MDG track record is mixed. Considerable progress is being made, but many countries are falling behind, with sub-Saharan Africa most at risk. The region is not on track to meet a single MDG by 2015.

Plans are being put in place to monitor the commitments companies make under the Business Call to Action, and to learn lessons on what works well for both businesses and poor communities, that can be replicated globally.

#### **Notes for editors**

- The Business Call to Action event is taking place in London on 6 May, hosted by Her Majesty’s Government and UNDP. All media places for the event have now been allocated.
- A **video and audio news release** is also available for media use on or after May 6 – this showcases seven of the initiatives from Citi, Coca-Cola, Diageo, Microsoft, Sumitomo Chemical, Thomson Reuters and Vodafone, and includes footage of their global CEOs talking about the

transformational impact that the projects will have. ([www.silverfish.tv](http://www.silverfish.tv) Go to FTP login page.  
User name: dfid Password: press)

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