

Uniting Nations, Uniting Business

by Tricia Bisoux

End genocide in Darfur. Ease tensions in the Middle East. Prevent nuclear proliferation. Reform the U.N.'s operations, which have changed little since its formation in 1945. These were just a few of the formidable tasks presented to Ban Ki-moon when he stepped into his role as Secretary-General of the United Nations, succeeding Kofi Annan, in December 2006.

But Ban's most daunting objective is to lead the organization to achieve its eight Millennium Development Goals: Eradicate poverty and hunger, improve global educational opportunities, promote gender equality, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, fight diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria, inspire environmental sustainability, and establish a global partnership of organizations to achieve these goals. If those weren't challenging enough, the organization plans to achieve its MDGs by 2015. Ban hopes, however, that the U.N. won't have to do it alone. He is promoting the U.N.'s Global Compact, an initiative that brings together government, nonprofits, educational institutions, and business to improve the prosperity of those at the bottom of the world's economic pyramid.

The world's businesses possess the power to make these objectives a reality. The contributions of business schools also will be essential in helping the U.N. meet its 2015 deadline, Ban stresses. By teaching social responsibility, he says, business schools can instill in each of their students the skills to change the world—and the intention to make a difference.

The United Nation's Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon believes that business may be the catalyst to bring peace and prosperity to the world.



You have pushed to redouble the world's efforts to achieve its Millennium Development Goals by 2015. What will it take to meet that deadline?

We are at the midpoint of a great campaign to end world poverty. Yet, too many nations have fallen behind. It is unacceptable that one child dies of hunger every five seconds. It is unacceptable that for two-thirds of the world, a glass of ordinary drinking water is a luxury. And it is unacceptable that 1 million people die from malaria every year.

In September, the U.N. will host a high-level meeting on the MDGs, with a special focus on Africa. I am confident that the solutions to reach these goals exist, but we need the political will to scale up existing approaches and create better synergy.

Success in some countries demonstrates that rapid and large-scale progress is feasible if we combine strong government leadership, good policies, and practical strategies to increase public investments in vital areas. It's feasible if we obtain adequate financial and technical support from the international community.

What should the world's business schools do to help?

As a result of privatization and market liberalization, domestic and foreign companies have become increasingly influential in many developing countries. And with more influence comes more responsibility. Companies must be prepared to respond to the growing demands for transparency and accountability, particularly with respect to their economic, social, and environmental impact. This requires, first and foremost, that those who run the businesses be aware of the challenges and opportunities they face in the age of globalization.

Here, business schools can play a crucial role by ensuring that tomorrow's business leaders understand what responsible business means and how it can have positive effects for both the company's bottom line and the society in which it operates.

Recently, the U.N. worked with organizations such as AACSB International and EFMD to launch the Principles of Responsible Management Education. How important

The PRME Essentials

The Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME) were officially instituted in July 2007, as part of the U.N. Global Compact. Institutions participating in the initiative make a commitment to align their missions and strategies, as well as their core competencies, with the values embodied in the six PRME principles.

As of April, more than 100 business schools had become signatories to PRME, endorsing its principles and committing to use these principles to guide their curricula. By signing on to PRME, institutions express their

voluntary commitment to promoting, encouraging, and exchanging best practices in areas such as curriculum development, research, business joint partnerships, and public dialogue about the importance of generating sustainable value for business and society.

PRME was developed by representatives of the U.N. Global Compact, AACSB International—The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, the Aspen Institute's Business and Society Program, and the European Foun-



ation for Management Development. Also involved were representatives of the Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative, a coalition of business schools, corporations, and leadership centers convened to promote corporate global responsibility; and Net

Impact, an international nonprofit that offers its more than 10,000 members educational programs in responsible leadership for use in universities, organizations, and communities. Sixty business school administrators and scholars served on the PRME task force.

More information about the United Nations Global Compact can be found at www.unglobalcompact.org. To read more about PRME, visit www.unprme.org or www.aacsb.edu/resource_centers/PRME_final.pdf.

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is PRME to the U.N.? Why should business schools adopt these principles?

The Principles for Responsible Management Education initiative is the first organized relationship between business schools and the United Nations. When these principles were presented in Geneva last year, I stressed that this initiative has the capacity to take the case for universal values in business into classrooms on every continent.

To date, the PRME initiative has been very well received by the global business school community. I believe that the initiative can serve as an effective guiding framework for a systemic curriculum change in the spirit of the principles of the U.N. Global Compact. Of course, the U.N. is committed to this effort. It is in our best interest to plant the seed for a generation of future leaders who are sensitive to the enormous challenges the world faces and their own role in addressing them.

In what ways can business schools work directly with the U.N. to enhance their programs and further the U.N.'s overall objectives?

I believe that the best results can be achieved when business schools align their core competencies—education, research, and thought leadership—with the overall objectives of the U.N. Through education, business schools can shape the skills, competence, and decision-making capability of tomorrow's business leaders. Through research, they can develop means and frameworks for responsible business practices. Last, academia can influence public opinion about the critical importance of responsible business behavior to master environmental, social, and governance challenges.

Business faculty are conducting more research on the effects of "peace through commerce" and business initiatives that benefit the "base of the pyramid," such as microfinancing. How much impact do you think these efforts have had? What other trends do you find most promising?

First of all, I want to applaud these streams of research, as they are crucial to understanding how business can contribute to more peaceful and stable societies. It is becoming



increasingly clear that for markets to prosper, societies must be healthy in the widest sense.

Through the Global Compact, business has an opportunity to help ensure that globalization delivers benefits to the greatest number of people, including the poor. I have met with many committed business leaders who acknowledge the core role that business can play in this regard. We have seen a number of innovative and effective approaches, from new forms of public-private partnerships to innovative business models that treat sustainability as a positive value driver. In many cases, the positive impact has been remarkable. But we must bring these efforts to scale in order to really make a difference.

A few years ago, some began to criticize the U.N., arguing that it had become irrelevant to global issues. That criticism has waned, but still, you've set the goal



of building a “stronger and more powerful United Nations.” What is your definition of a more powerful U.N.? How will the organization reach that level?

Looking to the coming year and beyond, we can foresee a daunting array of challenges. They are problems that respect no borders—that no country, big or small, rich or poor, can resolve on its own. Thus, more than ever, we live in an era of collective action. The U.N. cannot deliver everything, of course, but my vision is an administration focused on results—efficient, directed, pragmatic, and accountable, an administration representing excellence, integrity, and pride in serving the global good.

To deliver on this vision, we must modernize the way the U.N. works. Perhaps the biggest long-term challenge is changing our U.N. culture, to make the organization faster and more nimble, more responsive to the demands of our modern world. The main themes are to simplify, rationalize, and delegate. I place a very high priority on implementing the management reforms that member states have previously approved to promote greater transparency,

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accountability, and efficiency. In the end, I also know that transforming the way the U.N. does business—shifting our focus to emphasize results rather than bureaucratic process—will take patience, perseverance, and courage.

As you revitalize the U.N., you also must focus on so many world crises—from genocide and political conflicts, to global warming and water shortages, to poverty among the world’s “bottom billion.” Of these issues, what is your top priority, and why?

Of the many objectives that the U.N. is tasked with, the main priority areas are peace and security—most importantly in Africa and the Middle East—as well as nonproliferation and disarmament of nuclear weapons, community development, climate change, and human rights.

Often I am humbled by the scale of the challenges before us. So much is expected of us. Delivering on those hopes, faithfully and effectively, will require great effort and discipline. We must do much more to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. It is not too late, I am certain. But it will require the collective efforts of all actors—governments, civil society, the private sector, and, of course, our organization.

That will require moving governments and large groups of people—each with different agendas—in a unified direction. How do you persuade such disparate groups to work together and drive real change on such a large scale?

An increasingly interdependent world recognizes that the challenges of today are best dealt with through collective action. The U.N. has the power to convene the relevant partners to deliver that action. Our work often requires careful and sensible diplomacy, a willingness to listen, and a willingness to make compromises for the greater good. But I believe that the pendulum of history is swinging in our favor and that multilateralism is back.

What kinds of learning experiences and skills do you think business students need to become effective leaders and problem solvers in today’s global environment?

Business vision, strategy, and organization are powerful forces. To secure the future of the global community, students must possess the capacities of future leaders; they will require dedication and advocacy. The international order faces great



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challenges in the interconnected realms of development, security, and human rights. I hope that today's students can become aware of these challenges and learn to cope with them accordingly.

If you were to address a class of business students, what essential advice would you give them?

I would make the case that business success does not rely on financial success as an isolated ideal. Consideration should also be given to environmental and social issues. While market success is important, it is equally important to uphold high ethical standards. The two approaches do not contradict each other but are counterparts.

To better understand how a principled approach to doing business can work, I would, of course, encourage students to study the U.N. Global Compact. I also would emphasize that their creativity, energy, and intellect are essential for tackling today's and tomorrow's global challenges.

What experiences in your own education and early career most prepared you to be the U.N.'s Secretary-General?

As a child of the Korean War, I grew up viewing the United Nations as a savior—it's an organization that helped my country, South Korea, recover and rebuild from a devastating conflict. Because of decisions made under the U.N. flag, my country was able to grow and prosper in peace.

This prosperity, in turn, helped a boy from rural Korea rise up through his country's diplomatic ranks and eventually become Secretary-General of the United Nations.

What do you wish you'd known before you became Secretary-General?

I always knew how complicated diplomacy can be and how slowly real progress sometimes comes. But there's nothing you need to know that you don't learn quickly, when required. I can say that I did not fully understand how challenging it can be to move a large multinational bureaucracy.

We've talked about the goals of the United Nations.

What are your personal goals? What do you most want to accomplish as an individual, during your tenure with the U.N. and after?

The challenges we face today are many, and my resolve is strong. I am determined to make progress on the pressing issues of our time, step by step, by building on achievements along the way and by working with member states and civil society.

I would like to be remembered as Secretary-General for what I accomplished, as someone who got things done. I am not a philosopher. I am a man of action. I've said many times that I want to promise less and deliver more. I say so again, here. 