8th Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals.

Session 1: Strengthening trust in science and technology

Prepared remarks by Dr. Scott Ratzan, Executive Director, Business Partners for Sustainable Development  3 May 2023

Thanks to our distinguished moderator Ms. Quarraisha Abdool Karim who is also the Co-Chair of the Secretary-General's 10-Member-Group supporting the Technology Facilitation Mechanism. I also thank the co-chairs of the Forum H.E. Ms. Mathu Joyini, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations and H.E. Mr. Thomas Woodroffe, United Kingdom Ambassador to the UN Economic and Social Council for the recognition of the integral role of the private sector on this opening session Strengthening trust in science and technology.

I am Dr. Scott Ratzan and have multiple roles as a Professor, Editor of the Journal of Health Communication, and lead for Business Partners for Sustainable Development, an initiative of the USCIB Foundation. I am pleased to return to the UN in person and be a lead discussant of this important session with the mission to support “Evidence-based policy to solve the interconnected and complex challenges our societies are facing at all levels.”

Recently, my work as a Senior Fellow at Harvard Kennedy School in the Center for Business and Government supported the integral role for the private sector. While at Harvard, along with esteemed colleagues including the late John Ruggie, I led development of Guiding Principles for Multisectoral Engagement for Sustainable Health. These were built upon work I have been engaged in working with the UN including testimony before the US Congress on the potential of multisectoral partnerships for the MDGs and later serving as co-chair of the UN Secretary General's Innovation Working Group on Women and Children's health.

We are advancing our efforts today as trust in business has increased and now outpaces government, media, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Most people perceive their employer as a trusted institution, and people want more societal engagement from business, not less.

In the 2023 Edelman Trust barometer demonstrates that barometer, “my employer” ranks 25 points higher than government or elected officials. Further, 72% of respondents want business to defend facts and expose questionable science being used to justify bad social policy.

Today, I am pleased to share what we instigated with the U.S. Council for International Business (USCIB) and the USCIB Foundation when COVID was declared a pandemic.
We launched Business Partners to CONVINCE (CoalitioN for Vaccine Information Communication and Engagement) at the virtual meeting of the UN High level Political Forum (HLPF) in 2020 to engage the private sector and other key stakeholders to build health, science, and vaccine literacy as well as support the uptake of COVID vaccines equitably.

Today, we work in partnership along with academics, NGOs and other stakeholders roles to advance vaccine literacy, strengthen trust and also address challenges with misinformation for employers of all sizes. Along with the collaboration of USCIB affiliates -- the International Organization of Employers, International Chamber of Commerce, Business at OECD, and the Society for Human Resource Management, we launched the campaign “There’s more to be done” that includes advancement of vaccine literacy, uptake and other key issues for employers to integrate in their workplace strategies.

The new global campaign There’s More To Be Done, includes free open-access learning modules and resources promoting policies and programs vaccine literacy with trustworthy communication and effective COVID recovery. We intend to evolve this campaign to advance health and well-being and addressing other long-term challenges identified here on the UN panel including Education and Infrastructure.

With Covid recovery, and our efforts to strengthen trust in science and technology amongst resilient societies, we also will continue to advance ideas with our 2023 Business Partner Roundtable series. Our first roundtable advanced engagement with innovative ideas to address global health threats with a “whole of society” approach as identified by 386 experts in the “Multinational Delphi consensus to end the COVID-19 public health threat” led by colleagues at CUNY Graduate School of Public Health & Health Policy that was published in Nature. Our next Roundtable theme will address infrastructure (SDG 9) along with our esteemed partners at the Wilson Center in Washington DC. Later in the year we will host on climate change and food security. We intend on sharing with the broad UN community and stakeholders throughout the globe as we embrace SDG 17 - Partnerships for the Goals.

All of these multisector activities work to support the mission of today’s Forum. At this historical time rebounding from the first pandemic in a century, we need to build support for science, technology and innovation with trustworthy partners. We welcome the opportunity to engage at all levels from global, national, regional to local. Please feel free to contact us for further engagement.

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