

**Sustainia Action Forum  
Roundtable Opening Remarks by Georg Kell  
Executive Director, UN Global Compact**

**11 October 2012  
Copenhagen, Denmark**

It is a real pleasure and a privilege to be here.

It is wonderful to work with Monday Morning and Erik Rasmussen, Laura Storm and their team again, as we did three years ago.

I wish to speak to you today with my mind and heart in a very direct manner. The message I have is one of encouragement, on one hand, but also one of urgency.

Let me provide a brief reflection of where corporate sustainability stands, and where Sustainia fits in – why we are here and why we believe Sustainia is critical for scaling up and accelerating solutions that are very much needed.

I think we all agree that we live in a volatile world, where there is very little predictability. There is certainty only about the prospect of more uncertainty.

We know that on the climate front, with all likelihood we will not be able to manage global warming within two degrees Celsius. We know that the world is fragmenting in many ways where it is increasingly difficult to forge multilateral consensus from the top down. However, we also know that the world is ever more interdependent, that the free flow of ideas, trade and investment has brought enormous benefits. In fact, the biggest decrease of poverty and human misery has occurred in the past ten years.

We live in a world full of contradictions. On one hand, we have the means and the ways and the possibilities to make lasting positive change. On the other hand, we do not seem to be willing to mobilize the collective necessary political will to make it happen.

In the face of historic challenges, I fear that leadership for the long-term collective good is in a deep freeze. I am deeply concerned about the dark clouds on the political front. Fragmentation is making us forget some of the important lessons learned after the Second World War. We are deeply concerned about the slow progress in deciding and creating smart incentive structures that reward good performance. We are deeply concerned about the fracturing political consensus worldwide.

This is where business comes in and where business increasingly is willing to step up and to push forward.

Just a few months ago, we welcomed 2,700 corporate participants, investors and others in Rio de Janeiro [at the Rio+20 Corporate Sustainability Forum] – where for the first time in UN history

the private sector arguably was ahead of Governments. Business has shown that it is possible to move ahead. Business is organizing itself around platforms, around issues, around concepts. Business is increasingly willing to invest in sustainable solutions.

Sustainability, according to our definition, is the long-term delivery of values in financial, environmental, social and ethical terms. It means that companies recognize that the long-term success of their operations is closely tied to the well-being of the countries and communities where they operate. By being proactive and ahead of the curve, they assure that future leadership goes to those who are most advanced in that field.

But leadership can only happen if it has followers. You cannot be a leader without leading toward transformation. Otherwise, you isolate yourself and you operate on an island.

This is where the Global Compact has made inroads around the world, with 7,000 corporate participants from 135 countries organized in country networks pushing the bottom-up change agenda – hoping that over time they will make the case and inspire policy makers to do likewise.

This corporate sustainability movement is truly global today. The good news is that it is happening in the North and the South, in the East and the West. It can only be sustained if there is genuine front running commitment and leadership to push the agenda forward. It can only happen if innovation, new ideas, creation of markets, and the demonstration of competitiveness through cooperative engagement show the way forward.

This is why Sustainia is so important. It holds all the ingredients of being a catalytic force to accelerate, inspire and bring to scale the many efforts that are already taking place.

Corporate sustainability has grown enormously over the past decade, yet it is not yet a transformative force – although it has the potential.

We will be transformative once we have a tipping point constellation. The tipping point is within sight. We know it is achievable but we are not yet there.

The most urgent task now is to scale up, to look for inspiring solutions, to deepen engagement in this agenda – in order to ensure that corporate sustainability is a driving force for organizational change, for design, for implementation, for organizing market and societal relations. This must become transformative.

This is where Sustainia – the concept of innovation, creating new forward-looking solutions – is immensely powerful. We are committed to continuing to invest in Sustainia, and making it an integral part of the narrative of corporate sustainability.

I appeal to you, leaders here in this wonderful country of Denmark and neighboring countries where so much innovation is happening, where you are making major investments in the future, to also invest in the mainstreaming of this idea. Your leadership will be sustained if others follow.

This is where scaling up, innovation and the spread of best practices all come together. I applaud everyone who is here to invest in Sustainia as a catalytic force to drive forward scale, and I hope for a future that is more secure and safe.

In the meantime, we must keep a close eye on politics. If world markets become more fragmented, inward-oriented and protectionist, then I fear our efforts may not have the impact they could otherwise have.

We should also stand up for openness, engagement and cooperation, and not give up on multilateralism. Ultimately, we have to come back to the world community, and we need to form consensus on greenhouse gases and carbon emissions. We have to win over everyone.

We are now in a phase of bottom-up change. The best way forward is to work from within and to make change happen by scaling up through the private sector.

I am very privileged to be here. Erik, I hope that Sustainia will grow and blossom. I assure you and all the other partners that we are proud to be associated with Sustainia.

Thank you very much.

# # #