

First meeting of the Group of Friends of Paragraph 47 on Corporate Sustainability Reporting

In Rio de Janeiro, on June 20th, a group of governments came together in an initiative to commit to corporate sustainability reporting, in support of Paragraph 47 of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development – Rio+20 – outcome document. Brazil, Denmark, France and South Africa formed the ‘group of **friends of paragraph 47**’ to advance corporate sustainability reporting. They invited the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) to support them.

Paragraph 47 states :

We acknowledge the importance of corporate sustainability reporting and encourage companies, where appropriate, especially publicly listed and large companies, to consider integrating sustainability information into their reporting cycle. We encourage industry, interested governments as well as relevant stakeholders with the support of the UN system, as appropriate, to develop models for best practice and facilitate action for the integration of sustainability reporting, taking into account the experiences of already existing frameworks, and paying particular attention to the needs of developing countries, including for capacity building.

The Group held its first (telephone) conference on Friday 31st of August, with the participation of:

Member countries:

- **Brazil:** Ms. Ana Maria Vieira dos Santos Neto, Ms. Carla Miranda, Ms. Mariana Roberta da Silva (Ministry of Environment)
- **Denmark:** Mr. Victor Kjaer, Rune Gottlieb Skovgaard (Ministry of Business and Growth - Danish Business Authority)
- **France:** Ms. Catherine Larrieu , Ms. Genevieve Besse (Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy), Mr. Michel Doucin (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Ambassador for CSR)
- **South Africa:** Ms. Dorah Nteo (Ministry of Environment) had to apologize due to a sudden private problem but asked GRI to express the strong support of her government to the initiative

Secretariat:

- **Global Reporting Initiative (GRI):** Ms. Teresa Fogelberg, Mr. Pietro Bertazzi
- **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP):** Ms. Elisa Tonda, Ms. Garrette Clark, Ms. Livia Pagotto, Ms. Yuki Yasui, Mr. Jacinto Coello

The participants adopted the following conclusions:

1. To elaborate of a common vision document

They recognized that, belonging to different regions of the world and representing different levels of economic and social development, they share a common vision: corporate

transparency and accountability are key elements to enhancing the private sector's contribution to sustainable development, and making sustainability reporting standard practice among companies will contribute to monitor the impacts on and the contribution to sustainable development by the corporate sector. They are convinced that the role of the Governments is essential in ensuring the effective application of laws and regulations so as to foster a culture of compliance with the law. Therefore they consider that the Governments have a key role to play *"to develop models for best practice and facilitate action for the integration of sustainability reporting"*, as stated by Paragraph 47 of the Rio + 20 Declaration.

The Group acknowledged the importance of the recognition of the topic by UN Member States in Rio+20 and the opportunity of implementing what was agreed in Rio, with a positive, constructive and forward looking approach. The group also underlined the need of public policies giving impulse to Corporate Sustainability Reporting, and aims at going beyond the current wording of paragraph 47 in its results.

They considered that, before enlarging the group to other governments and organizations, they wanted to shape these considerations in their common vision, which would become the Charter for the future membership. A draft, presented by France, was discussed and will be later commented and improved, with the aim of being adopted during the next meeting.

2. The objectives of the Group of Friends of Paragraph 47

They agreed that the main purposes of their initiative are:

- to keep the attention on Corporate Sustainability Reporting high on the International agenda;
- to share lessons learnt between governments and other organizations actively promoting Corporate Sustainability Reporting;
- to identify best practices and to promote them; and
- to invite any government and organization convinced of the importance of the topic to join the group, bearing in mind that it should be geographically balanced .

3. The adopted agenda and road map

The participants agreed that the next meeting of the founding members of the Group of Friends will be held at the margins of the GRI Governmental Advisory Group taking place in New Delhi on September 27th. The document of the common vision and of the rules of procedure should be adopted in this occasion

The second physical meeting, enlarged to States having expressed their interest and sharing the common vision, could be organized on 15th November during the World Forum Lille – Responsible Economy (to be held on 14th-16th November 2012 – www.worldforum-lille.org). On 16th November a meeting with "Alliance Network" (composed of business sector representatives of different countries) convened by the Forum, could give an opportunity for launching the outreach to non-governmental participants of the Initiative. A press-conference could also be organized.