

## A GLOBAL COMPACT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT by Oliver F. Williams, C.S.C.

The week of September 21st, 2015, was perhaps the busiest in the history of the United Nations headquarters in New York City. I will highlight two of the events. On Friday morning, September 25th, Pope Francis addressed the world-wide heads of state and government and focused on the key themes of his leadership expressed well in the June 2015 encyclical, *On Care for Our Common Home (Laudate Si)*. He focused on the dangers from “the environmental deterioration caused by human activity,” the need to show compassion for immigrants, refugees and all the poor, and the urgent need to work for peace in a troubled world.

Following the address by Pope Francis, the 193 Member States of the United Nations adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of targets to help the poor that has been in committee discussions for the last three years. The SDGs are a set of aspirations for the next 15 years defining the sort of world we want, a world without poverty, harmful inequality and injustice and with public health and education available for all (See the list of the SDGs at <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/our-work/sustainable-development>).

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a rallying call for government officials, individuals, and businesses to rethink their policies and strategies and take action to move toward a better world. The United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) has been designated by the UN as the official agency to coordinate and advance the business contribution to the SDGs. The UNGC is a voluntary organization of over 14,000 members, including over 8,000 businesses in 150 countries, to advance the quality of life on the planet.

Some critics have read the Papal Encyclical on the Environment as hostile to capitalism and not open to the work of business involved with the UNGC. For example, while the Encyclical lists some of the legitimate shortcomings of capitalism, it does not reference the fact that over a billion people have been lifted out of dire poverty in the last 20 years because of global business. Because of this concern, the UN formed a small committee to prepare a brief response to the Encyclical (See “*Open Letter to His Holiness Pope Francis from the United Nations Global Compact Responding to Laudato Si*” at <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/news/2451-08-13-2015>). As a member of that committee, I was pleased to endorse and, praise the pope's vision while adding some language indicating that capitalism can be part of the solution and not simply the problem. Indeed the pope was clear at the UN that he sees business as playing a key role in advancing a better world for all. Reiterating a recurring theme, he said that “business is a noble vocation” but it must not neglect “service to the common good.” In a clarification of the pope’s position, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State at the Vatican, in a September 14, 2015 letter to a UN official responding to our *Open Letter* wrote: “the Holy Father is appealing to the consciences of all people of goodwill that there may be a greater awareness for responsible business practices; to this, the UN Global Compact can give a significant contribution.”

On Saturday, September 26th, CEOs of over 400 select businesses and heads of state came

together at the United Nations in a forum titled the **United Nations Private Sector Forum 2015: Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals**. Recognizing that many companies are already advancing the SDGs through their core businesses and philanthropy while at the same time contributing to their profitability, the forum was designed to increase the scale of company programs. At the Saturday session, a number of company leaders were asked to showcase how they are advancing the SDGs. As a member of the Board of Directors of the UN Global Compact Foundation, I found myself sitting near the likes of Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany; Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook; Bono, lead singer of the band U2; Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General; and Paul Polman, CEO of Unilever, among others.

Dozens of companies used the Forum as a platform to announce new programs in support of the SDGs. To name but a few: Sumitomo Chemical pledged to provide more than one million insecticide-treated bed nets to protect people from malaria (SDG3); GSK (GlaxoSmithKline) intends to improve access to healthcare for over 20 million underserved people by 2020 as well as to support refugee families arriving in Europe from Syria and Afghanistan (SDG 3 and 16). LEGO committed to implement Children's Rights and Business Principles and pledged US \$ 8.2 million to this effort ((SDG4). MASTERCARD has added a corporate priority to connect 500 million new people to an inclusive economy by 2020 (SDG 8); and Novo Nordisk committed to support the refugee crisis in Syria and made a 1 million Danish Kroner donation to the Danish Red Cross for refugee work. (For full listing and description of the business projects, see the website [unglobalcompact.org](http://unglobalcompact.org))

The theme of the meeting was expressed well by Lise Kingo, the new UNGC Executive Director: "From principled business practices to making long-term commitments aligned with the SDGs, we need more companies around the world to join the UN Global Compact and help to change the world around them."

To inform leaders and students and to encourage more companies to advance the work of the SDGs, the University of Notre Dame Center for Ethics and Religious Values in Business at the Mendoza College of Business with the United Nations Global Compact will convene a conference at the University of Notre Dame on April 3rd and 4th. Keynoted by Sir Mark Moody-Stuart, former CEO and Chairman of Shell Oil and Gas Companies and currently chair of the UNGC Foundation, those attending will hear Sir Mark challenge the companies to do more research on alternate energy possibilities. The other keynote speaker is Archbishop Bernadito Auza, the Pope's representative at the United Nations in New York City. Archbishop Auza will outline how the pope envisions the role of capitalism in the global economy. There will also be leading companies, government officials, and scholars participating. (See the conference website for updates on the program: <http://mendozaevents.nd.edu/Encyclical/>).

).