Leading Global Finance Institutions Come Together to Finance the Future We Want

Acknowledging Urgent Need for Action, Financiers and Policymakers Turn Spotlight on Sustainable Financial System

In the same week that China’s leaders set a new path for economic reform, the world’s premier financial organizations met in Beijing to discuss whether the world has the capability to finance the environmental challenges it faces. At the heart of the talks lies how to realign the financial system to finance a low-carbon, resource-efficient and sustainable path.

On the 12-13 November, over 400 participants attended the UNEP Finance Initiative 2013 Global Roundtable in Beijing, including policy makers and representatives from academia, civil society and the scientific community. In opening the conference, Mr. Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director, highlighted humanity’s current unsustainable path and stated that although greening of the economy has begun, it has not reached a critical mass and that private capital flows are a missing ingredient in the overall picture.

Banks, investors, insurers and other financial actors can undoubtedly play a key role in any transformation of the economy. They are shapers today of the economy of tomorrow.

“Some financial actors take a reactive and silent approach and wait for regulation”, said Mr. Joern Helms, Vice-President of the Bank of Taizhou, “but as a regional financial institution, we cannot separate the health of our own firm from the health of the community and the environment we operate in.”

Others pointed to the need for finance institutions to fill the leadership gap. "We can’t wait for Government action," said Mr. Jim Leape, Director General of WWF. “There is not enough time; all sectors and stakeholders, particularly in financial markets and the investment community need to take leadership now.”

The two-day conference also focused on China, Emerging Markets and the World Economy, providing insight into how emerging markets were dealing with these global challenges. David Pitt-Watson, Co-Chair of UNEP FI, said, “while the West is reeling from the Global Financial Crisis, it is
extraordinary to witness the fresh thinking now coming from China, Africa and Latin America. It is almost incredible, that when one is asked where the most innovative thinking on finance is, today they can answer it is in Sao Paulo, Beijing and Nairobi.”

With the third plenum of the 18th Communist Party of China Central Committee taking place during the same week as the Global Roundtable, how China's Ecological Civilization Policy is implemented and how it will transform the Chinese economy will determine whether China is a leader in greening the global economy.

Mr. Zheng Wanchun, from the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, said, “Accelerating the development of green economy is China's strategic need for sustainable development. Supporting the green economy is the social responsibility for all commercial banks, and the inherent requirements promote the transformation of business models and help realize a bank’s own sustainable development.”

The next challenge is to scale up the elements of a transformed financial system, while global policy signals fall into place. Mr. Steiner said that “the time is ripe—indeed to put in the crucial design elements that re-focus the capital markets in ways that unlock the finance needed to meet our mutual aims and the aspirations of the many”.

Note to editors:

About UNEP Finance Initiative (UNEP FI)

The United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative (UNEP FI) was established 21 years ago as a partnership between policy makers and financial intermediaries. With over 200 members representing banks, insurers, and investors from around the world, UNEP FI contributes the perspectives of financial institutions to United Nations and global activities on sustainable finance. UNEP FI's mission is to bring about systemic change in finance to support a sustainable world, which is highlighted in its motto "Changing finance, financing change".

www.unepfi.org

About the UNEP FI Global Roundtable (GRT)

The Global Roundtable (GRT) is the flagship biennial event of UNEP FI that brings together high-level representatives from financial institutions, governments, regulators, civil society, academia and the scientific community to galvanize action on sustainable finance. Since 1994, the GRT has been held in 12 cities, including Cambridge, Cape Town, Chicago, Frankfurt, Geneva, London, Melbourne, New York, Oslo, Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo and Washington, D.C.

www.unepfi.org/grt
For more information, please contact:

Nick Nuttall: Director, UNEP Division of Communications and Public Information and UNEP Spokesperson Tel: +254 762 3292 Email: nick.nuttall@unep.org

John Dombkins: UNEP FI Communications and Public Information, Tel: +41 22 91 78 134, Email: john.dombkins@unep.org