STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF
THE 3RD INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF CORPORATE SOCIAL
RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) FOCUSING ON SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT WHICH COINCIDED WITH THE INTERNATIONAL
CHILDHOOD CANCER DAY

16 February 2015
MAHAK charity complex, Tehran, Iran

Gary Lewis
UN Resident Coordinator
Distinguished participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It’s my great privilege to be here for the very first time.

As you have been told, I am the UN Resident Coordinator here in the Islamic Republic of Iran and I’ve worked in Iran for two years. And during that time I have had the pleasure of seeing – albeit indirectly – much of the great work that’s been done by Mahak and so I feel very honored and privileged to be here today.

My purpose however is to make two simple points.

The first is to emphasize the importance of one of the things that Mahak focuses on which is a Non-Communicable Disease called cancer. This disease is unfortunately increasing its profile in countries which are witnessing a transition in their public health landscape.

For many years we have been working in United Nations in Iran to address Communicable Diseases like HIV, Tuberculosis, and Malaria and in many ways we have managed to address and get on top of some of those problems.

Now we see increasingly the sorts of public health problems that characterize countries that are more wealthy and where the incidence of Non-Communicable Diseases is increasing. I am referring to things like diabetes, heart diseases, chronic lung disease, strokes and as I said cancer.

So, I congratulate MAHAK for the great work it’s done over last 20 years and I believe that MAHAK and others that focus on cancer – and specially children’s cancer – will come to be seen as increasingly important players in Iran’s future public health concerns.

That was my first point.

I have been given 10 minutes. So, I’d like to talk secondly about the issue of Corporate Social Responsibility which is a focus of our event today.
I could probably start by saying that the issue of partnering, partnerships is a very important one in the perspective of United Nations.

Our framework for working with our Member States is to help promote development focus on what currently we call the Millennium Developments Goals.

They’re about 15 years old and they’re still pretty relevant and strong.

Goal Number 8 of the eight MDGs is called ‘Promoting Partnerships’.

And indeed these are among the most powerful forces that promote sustainable development.

Speaking last month, in New York, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon said: “the challenges facing us on this planet are now so great that we cannot continue situation where individual and group interests still take presence over our shared priorities.”

And he continues: “We see enormous wealth, technological progress and unprecedented opportunity one hand, but this is coupled with great inequality and fragmentation, extreme violence and environmental degradation on the other hand.”

I believe that in finding solutions for our problems of now and the problems that will come to greet us in the future, in many respects driven by climate change – to which one the pervious speakers alluded – they can only be resolved through partnering.

And in that context, the corporate sector which is represented in this room today – quite heavily – is encouraged by me, and by many, to play a part in addressing these future challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are no longer in the position – if we ever were – to choose pure profit. Our growth must be inclusive. Our development must be sustainable. And our environment must be safeguarded.
These ideas – I believe – are what drove our former Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan to create UN’s Global Compact in the year 2000.

I am very happy to see Sir Mark Moody Stuart here – among us – and others who are with the Global Compact.

That, as I’m sure has been indicated earlier by previous speakers, is an entity coalition bringing together businesses, governments, civil societies and UN agencies to advance universal principles on the areas of environment, labor, human rights and anti-corruption.

It’s a powerful movement. It has a number of companies involved and the focus is on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Because, ladies and gentlemen, CSR goes beyond mere legal compliance.

It obliges companies to get engaged in actions that further some social good – beyond what might be called selfish interests of the firm. And as we look towards the future, I believe that spirit of partnership which the corporate community possesses and must develop lies at heart of what other speakers are talked about few moments ago – which is the Post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals.

A pact – which I believe and certainly hope – we will agree in September this year in New York and it will set out the framework for a future global efforts in sustainable development.

I have said before in other forums in Tehran that CSR is no longer, can no longer be considered as a luxury available only to large enterprises.

Now, I believe, instead, it needs to be recognized as a strategic management tool because it clearly influences decisions. It also influences operations and perhaps most importantly it influences reputations.

The past few decades I witnessed in Iran and elsewhere, the number of business corporations growing the size of the capital they manage growing, share of the profits they’re expected to meet is growing. And that’s fine because that’s how prosperity increases.
But companies should also be expected to act responsibly. They will be expected to contribute to the social, economic and environmental betterment of their communities.

This should not be seen as charity or goodwill. It should be seen as sound business investment in the community.

And with this in mind, I urge business people of Iran – as I have done before – and will continue to find out more about this CSR and engaged in partnering with others to make growth more inclusive and environmentally sustainable.

A lot is already going on. I’ve seen it myself. There are number of public corporations, private corporations and banks especially that are interested in working on some of the issues that are sustainable. They are interested to work with United Nations on this.

But more can be done. Much more can be done.

So I see this event today as one of a number of incremental steps that many of us are taking to unleash the positive, potential of the business community to address social needs.

And in that context, I pay respect again to our friends in MAHAK for having the vision and wisdom to engage on this issue – bring together a number of wise people – women and men – to sit and reflect on how they can contribute to their community.

And save lives.

*Kheili moteshakeram.*