

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

## A MAJOR OPPORTUNITY FOR THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The Czech Republic has been in the international spotlight recently because of the government's proposal to change the name of this great nation.

With the aim of giving the country a clearer identity, it is hoped that when our athletes appear at this year's Olympic Games in Rio De Janiero, the UN will have authorized the name change to "Czechia".

It may appear trivial, but the international image of the country is critical to its success. If the proposal is adopted, I hope it will go hand in hand with renewed efforts to enhance the reputation of Czech business as responsible.

I believe that the Czech Republic has an exciting prospect of becoming a global leader in sustainable development, move that would surely make this an interesting country in which to invest.

In spite of the world's many problems, when we welcomed in the start of 2016, we had cause for a special celebration. Because this marked the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – see below – which every member state of the United Nations has agreed to embrace. As ambitious and perhaps idealistic as they may sound, their purpose is to help make our world a better place for everyone.

I would like to suggest that these goals present a rich array of opportunities for Czech business.

The SDGs represent a new, universal set of goals, targets and indicators that UN member states will be expected to use to frame their agendas and political policies over the next 15 years. They follow and expand upon the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were agreed by governments in 2001 and expired at the end of last year.

It's not so long ago, sustainability was seen by most companies as little more than a peripheral 'green' issue – providing good public relations opportunities and perhaps useful for reducing energy and waste disposal costs or supporting some worthy community causes but hardly central to a company's core business.

That view is changing and business is heading towards a different and more encouraging place. Increasingly, companies from all sectors are having to confront and adapt to a range of disruptive forces including globalisation, increased urbanisation, intense competition for raw materials and natural

resources and a revolution in technology that is challenging the business models of many sectors while forcing all companies to be more accountable to, and transparent with, all their stakeholders.

As a result, sustainability is moving from the corporate sidelines into the mainstream. Faced with a future of uncertain energy costs, looming regulation on carbon emissions, concerns about access to raw materials and the availability of natural resources like water, companies all over the world are waking up to the reality that environmental sustainability is a key consideration.

Concurrently, those same companies are coming under greater scrutiny about their role in society. Fuelled by the explosion in online social networking, consumers, NGOs, the media and their own employees are holding companies to account about their treatment of workers, the sourcing and quality of their products and their corporate culture.

As companies navigate this uncertain business landscape, having a cohesive vision of environmental and social sustainability will help them develop new models for growth and opportunities to be product, service and market leaders. So there is surely no better time for the United Nations to launch these goals – a roadmap for good business growth for the next 15 years.

In some ways the SDGs seem like a continuation of the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In reality, they are very different. Business, for the most part, didn't focus on the MDGs because they were aimed at developing nations. The 17 SDGs, however, are relevant for every global company: they don't discriminate between mature and emerging economies and their focus is on the broader issues that drive sustainable development.

But why should business really care? The SDGs are a product of two years of multi-stakeholder negotiations, including business and the private sector, and all 193 UN member states are preparing to sign up to them. While the SDGs are not legally binding, they will act as de facto regulation and drive the implementation of national regulation and incentives to see them succeed.

I have confidence that when global companies align with the SDGs they will have a clearer view on how their business helps or hinders a govern-



ment to achieve its goals, and the opportunity to evidence and maintain their license to operate. The goals will also provide a competitive advantage over those companies that don't understand their impacts or fail to use the knowledge to revise their strategies accordingly.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) define global sustainable development priorities and aspirations for 2030 and seek to mobilise global efforts around a common set of goals and targets. The SDGs call for worldwide action among governments, business and civil society to end poverty and create a life of dignity and opportunity for all, within the boundaries of the planet.

Unlike their predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals, the SDGs explicitly call on all businesses to apply their creativity and innovation to solving sustainable development challenges. The SDGs have been agreed by all governments, yet their success relies heavily on action and collaboration by all actor, particularly the private sector.

The SDGs present an opportunity for business-led solutions and technologies to be developed and implemented to address the world's biggest sustainable development challenges.

As the SDGs form the global agenda for the development of our societies, they will allow leading companies to demonstrate how their businesses helps advance sustainable development, both by minimising negative impacts and maximising positive impacts on people and the planet.

Without doubt, these ambitious new goals are important to the future wellbeing of our world. They also provide exciting opportunities for Czech business and the future reputation of Czechia.

By Jonathan Wootliff

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### Sustainable Development Goals

