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Doing business in a better world: law firms back sustainable development

Host of law firm leaders pledge to steer world onto a “more equitable, inclusive and sustainable path”

By Ben Rigby

The leaders of a host of law firms from across the globe are among more than a thousand business leaders to have endorsed a United Nations statement on co-operation in support of sustainable development goals.

The roll call of managing partners, senior partners and chief executives backing the initiative includes Baker McKenzie chief executive Milton Cheng, Linklaters senior partner Charlie Jacobs and Justin D’Agostino, Herbert Smith Freehills’ chief executive.

They are joined – among others – by Sakari Lukinmaa, of Castrén & Snellman; Duarte de Athayde, of Abreu Advogados; Ricardo Inglez de Souza, of Inglez Werneck Ramos Cury e Françolin; Tom Kári Kristjánsson, of Plesner; Fernando Serec, of Tozzini Freire; João Vieira de Almeida, of Vieira de Almeida & Associados; and Denis Lysenko of Aequo Law Firm.

The roster, which also includes representatives of each of the Big Four accountants, pledged to come together to do “business in a better world” in a virtual presentation to UN secretary general António Guterres by Sanda Ojiambo, the executive director of the UN Global Compact (UNGC), the world’s largest corporate sustainability initiative.

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“Peace, justice and strong institutions are beneficial to the long-term viability of our organisations and are foundational for upholding the ten principles of the UNGC and achieving the sustainable development goals,” the statement reads.

“Now is our opportunity to learn from our collective experiences to realign behind the mission of the UN and steer our world onto a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable path. We are in this together — and we are united in the business of a better world.”

Cheng said: “As co-patrons of the UNGC’s action platform for peace, justice, and strong institutions, we’re delighted to support this and believe that good governance is a cornerstone of good business, and are proud to play a role in achieving the sustainable development goals.”

D’Agostino said his firm was “proud to be supporting the United Nations’ pledge to multilateralism”. He added: “Global commitment to corporate sustainability from the business sector is particularly critical during this period of unprecedented disruption and global transformation.”

The goal, he said, was aligned with HSF’s objective to be an ethical, inclusive and transparent business.

Julia Hayhoe, managing director of Hayhoe Consulting and formerly chief strategy officer at Baker McKenzie, said that affirming the UNGC was “a great way for the legal profession to unite using its great privilege, capabilities and the torch of the rule of law”.

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She added: “The challenge, of course, is to convert good words into great systemic action. All our stakeholders are watching, and I’m sure the profession is more than up for the task.”

The initiative marks the UN’s 75th birthday.

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