

Plenary Session n°1

« A socially and environmentally responsible economy opened to the diversity of cultures and origins »



Tuesday 23rd October 2007

Speakers :

- Mrs Shirin EBADI (Iran): Nobel Peace Prize, first female judge in Iran
- M. Deon ROSSOUW (South Africa): President of the International Society of Business, Ethics and Economics and Head of the Philosophy department at the University of Pretoria
- M. Lassaâd EL BEJI (Tunisia): President of the International Association of Craft and Medium sized Enterprises (IACME)
- Mrs Sophia ECONOMACOS (Greece): President of the Chamber of Commerce of Athens, and President of the EUROCHAMBRES women network
- M. Fernando FRANCISCA (Brasil): CSR Programme's CEO of Petrobras



Shirin EBADI, who opened the debates of the meetings 2007, placed the issue of the variety of cultures and origins in a wider field: responsible economy and political responsibility. She approached the **place of the peoples and the Human Rights**. Among other issues, she evokes the scientific improvements and also its threats to the mankind and calls up to a regulation of the market economy: "*Profit is not intrinsically bad [...] but if we don't think of a way to frame it [...] it can lead to fatal consequences.*"

According to her, **Coran and democracy are not incompatible**. She regrets the absence of democracy in countries where natural resources are not shared. Finally, cultural diversity can generate serious incomprehension. People of Iraq do not understand why the US Congress intervenes in their nation's policies. Such a situation can only strengthen or make instability in Middle East last. And the solution cannot go through war, it will only go through a political approach.

Through the other interventions, a certain optimism concerning ethical ideas stands out, including in developing countries. But this progression cannot only result from the laws imposed by the politics. Firms can and must go beyond the law in their fight against discriminations. **Diversity is source of added value for the company, it stimulates and can increase the access to new markets.**

The examples of Petrobras in Brazil or FN Metro Bank in South Africa illustrate it well. Moreover, the example of the *women network of Eurochambres* shows that the exchanges of good practices among firms are a source of progress. That is the way this networks aims at working in his fight against the persisting glass ceiling for women wishing to access higher responsibilities.

Beyond these progresses, great inequalities in wealth distribution last. Mrs. EBADI raises the issue: "*how to live in a world without tensions, when 80% of the global wealth is in the hands of 1% of the population?*" Plagues like HIV or poverty remain important causes of exclusion, particularly in Africa. Mr. ROSSOUW shows us through examples that there are two different approaches to consider HIV in a firm: a vertical authoritarian communication, based on management, and another one based on empowerment and implication of the employees. Big firms, as well as Small and medium firms and craft companies, must be conscious that contributing to fight against poverty or illness means as well opening to new potential customers.

It emerges from this first session that Responsible Economy is not an utopia, it exists at the scale of certain firms, and in the respect of cultural differences. Nevertheless, at the scale of states, we are far from respecting this diversity and from placing populations in the centre of economic priorities. All speakers agree on this point: it's by setting peace among cultures, freedom and democracy for peoples, and helping the most discriminated that human kind will grow up towards future stakes. **This is called being responsible.**