

Press Statement by Ms. Susie C. Pontarolli Environment and Corporate Citizenship Division Copel-Companhia Paranaense de Energia

Press Conference on the Launch of the Women's Empowerment Principles

Good morning, everybody!

First of all, I would like to thank UNIFEM and the Global Compact Office for this precious opportunity for myself, personally, and the company I work for, of being part of this historical moment.

Copel, which I represent here today, is a power utility in Southern Brazil, whose main mission is to generate and deliver accessible electricity to the whole population of the state of Paraná, meaning more than 3 million connected households.

At the moment, Copel's total workforce is around eight thousand direct and five thousand outsourced employees.

We signed the Global Compact in 2001 and since then we have been trying hard to understand and incorporate the principles, as the corporate pace allows us to.

I would like to point out that with me, here, today, there is a special person also representing Copel. It is my dear friend and colleague, Ms. Marlene Zannin, the first woman at Board level ever, since the company was founded in 1954.

The plain fact of having a woman at that decision level, and most specially a Director of Environment and Corporate Citizenship, speaks a lot and loud about how much progress has been made in our corporate culture since we committed to the Global Compact.

This is something we could have never dreamed of back in 1999, when we got started with the first steps towards Corporate Social Responsibility.

It is important to remark that signing the Global Compact was really a turning point in Copel's efforts to promote Corporate Citizenship and Sustainability. And today, I feel we are taking another huge stride.

An initiative such as the launch of this rich set of corporate principles, based on universal human values and rights, is a crucial tool for professionals and businesses who are struggling to understand how to really promote equality and justice in their daily practices.

Being a collective, multistakeholder construction process in itself, the Women's Empowerment Principles turned out to be a document that is meaningful for both, individuals and corporations.

I am so sure that, just like the Compact, these principles will help to legitimize serious efforts companies are taking towards non-discrimination and gender equality, not only within their borders, but also in society as a whole, which is really the challenge we are all facing.

Corporations tend to reflect the society which they are a part of. And this society, as we all know well, is unequal and discriminatory.

But the more sustainability calls for immediate action, the more I realize that the part of the business world that is effectively committed to the values of sustainability is assuming a pioneering role, helping push public policies forward, to a more sustainable and fair approach.

And this set of principles will no doubt legitimize these efforts, providing a platform for discussion of these issues both internally and externally, with partners, suppliers, peers, communities, with global backing and the whole strength of the UNIFEM, Global Compact and the UN brand itself.

As a stronger business case is emerging, more and more companies are getting to realize that a diverse system - be it eco or social system - is a stronger one – more adaptable to changes, more resilient and this is key to the survival of business, helping companies to better understand their markets and consequently survive and grow.

And no doubt, the document that is being launched here today will be of huge help !

Thank you