



ST. JAMES'S PALACE

When in February 1990 I invited international business leaders to the first experimental meeting of my Business Leaders Forum in Charleston, South Carolina, few could have foreseen the consequences. Five years later many of the world's leading companies have joined us in an effort to put the philosophy of sustainable development into practice.

In 1990 the threats of ecological disaster were growing as poverty and short-term thinking continued to place unsustainable demands on the environment. The world was changing rapidly as many nations adopted a market economy approach for the first time. In this new world business has greater responsibilities to act sensitively in their global markets and to demonstrate leadership as partners in the sustainable development of emerging, as well as advanced economies.

In spite of recession affecting many countries, my Business Leaders Forum has managed to advance in three significant areas. We have brought people together to understand each others' perspectives and address crucial issues of social development. We have communicated ideas and examples of best practice. Most importantly, we have managed to be a catalyst for practical action by demonstrating the results of partnerships between business and communities in several countries.

In this review of the first five years of my Business Leaders Forum, pioneering projects and examples of best practice are described both to inform others and, I hope, to inspire them to action. There remains much to be done, and the real challenge is still ahead as the reasons why we started are now even more pressing. Over the next five years I hope many more companies, communities and institutions will become more involved and demonstrate, even to the sceptics, what more can be achieved by a partnership approach to development.

In this, our fifth anniversary year, I wish to express my warmest gratitude to the business leaders and their companies who have supported us, to our many local partners, and to the international agencies who work with us. I hope that they will continue in this international partnership for the long-term benefit of all their stakeholders and future generations.

Charles