

“Dare to dialog?” – experts debate on the conditions of constructive stakeholder relations at this year’s symposium of the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development

- *Dialog among different groups of society is important, as diversity of opinion can lead to better solutions*
- *For dialog to be successful, however, the rules of conversation must be set and goals must be defined*
- *The annual symposium of the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development offers an important platform for public dialog about sensitive economic development and social issues*

Basel, 4 December, 2008 – International experts will meet tomorrow, Friday, to discuss parameters for constructive dialog between stakeholder groups from politics, business and society. The Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development’s 10th symposium is entitled “Dare to dialog? - Conditions for constructive stakeholder relations.”

The motivation for this topic is that not only companies but also institutions and social groups tend to focus too much on themselves. This leads to opinions being formed in a "vacuum", often based on insufficient information. Dialog can channel diverse opinions into new, groundbreaking solutions. Before this can happen, however, pre-conditions and limits must be established.

“It’s important to agree on the goals and content of the dialog in advance, and to define 'rules of engagement' such as beginning and end as well as conditions for continuing or abandoning dialog,” says Klaus M. Leisinger, President and CEO of the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development. A well-prepared, professionally managed dialog can provide positive learning experiences, he adds.

Renowned speakers will include Egon Bahr, known as the architect of German Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt's “Ostpolitik,” who initiated talks with eastern European governments during the Cold War. Psychotherapist and writer Julia Onken will focus on the importance of honesty, respect and empathy among conversation partners. François Meienberg from the Berne Declaration will talk about the limits of dialog, for instance when someone tries to use it to manipulate others or stall specific actions.

The foundation’s annual public symposium was designed as a forum for critical reflection and controversial debates that examine issues from varying perspectives and developmental approaches. The audience will also be diverse: Some 400 people – representatives from development organizations, state officials, scientists, students and business representatives – are expected to take part in this year's symposium.

Photos and presentations from the symposium will be available on the website of the foundation: www.novartisfoundation.org/symposium.

About the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development

The Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development is a nonprofit organization whose activities form part of the Corporate Responsibility portfolio of Novartis AG, which finances the foundation's operations. The foundation's mission is to support healthcare programs in developing countries, providing help for self-help. Its core competencies also include in-depth analysis, consulting and publications in the fields of corporate responsibility and development policy. By harnessing synergies between project work, think tank activities and the facilitation of dialog, it elaborates innovative strategies for common development problems. In 2007, the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development invested approximately CHF 10 million in projects, largely in Africa and Asia.

For more information on the foundation and on specific projects, please visit: www.novartisfoundation.org.

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