

Radovan Jelašić: Corporate social responsibility and protection of the rights of the disabled

Speech by Mr Radovan Jelašić, Governor of the National Bank of Serbia, at the Conference on Corporate Social Responsibility and Protection of the Rights of the Disabled, Belgrade, 9 June 2008.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a true honour for the National Bank of Serbia to be a member of the Serbian Global Compact network and the UNDP's local partner in promoting it. The Serbian Global Compact network already boasts 26 members, which will, no doubt, contribute to this initiative as much as they can. One of the key principles underlying the Global Compact is the protection of human and labour rights.

Disabled persons in Serbia live in an environment of discrimination and prejudice, for which we alone are to blame, not only as citizens, but as employers as well. I am absolutely sure that we can count on full cooperation of disabled persons and their organizations, and that the ball is in our court now – it is the citizens and employers who should provide their undivided support to the disabled. The employers attending the conference have made a huge step forward in this respect by the sheer fact of coming here today. They did not turn a blind eye to the disabled persons' issue or shelved it away as the “problem of the state” – we are the state.

I sometimes have a feeling, and practice has confirmed it too, that foreign and private-owned companies tend to do a lot more in the area of corporate social responsibility and protection of the rights of the disabled than public enterprises. Although the problems that the disabled face day to day are countless, some of the most common ones include: lack of social responsibility, prejudice, inadequacy or inadequate implementation of existing legislation and regulations, and lack of access to transportation. And while the state can and should solve a number of these issues, there is plenty of work for us, too.

Let us begin from the basics: who is to blame for the inaccessibility of buildings and public institutions (the National Bank of Serbia being one of them) to the disabled? I will not even try to pin the blame on somebody else. I am to be blamed, I and my colleagues for not having done enough to put things right. Last week the National Bank of Serbia received from the Centre for the Development of Inclusive Society the results of an expert study based on which our office buildings will be entirely adjusted to the needs of the disabled. By the end of the year, our buildings, most notably the one in the Slavija Square, will be accessible to everybody. In addition to this, the National Bank of Serbia organizes visits for the disabled to the money museum in our head office building (12 Kralja Petra Street). Therefore, I would like to use this opportunity to invite all of the people present here to give us a call and set up the time and date of their visit – and we are ready to cover a part of the costs involved.

Today's conference is an opportunity for me and my colleagues to acquire some specific knowledge and to hear about the experience of other people in this area, which will hopefully help us all in performing our public functions better.

In terms of hiring disabled persons, as the governor of the National Bank of Serbia, which is an institution of public significance, I can only say that I see no reason for waiting for the adoption of the Law on the Employment of the Disabled. I am deeply convinced that public institutions should take the lead in this respect and set an example for the private businesses. The NBS will resort to affirmative action in its staff recruitment so as to give the disabled a chance to become equal members of the society, which they will never become without jobs or stable income. And now let us look at the socially responsible practices of the

NBS: this year, the National Bank will give three scholarships to final year students, who will be obligated to work for the NBS once they complete their studies. More information on this will be available on our website. Once the adaptation of our office buildings is completed, we will be able to increase the number of students doing their summer practice program in the NBS by five students with disabilities.

Finally, I would like to invite all the interested participants to gather again in September to exchange ideas and consult on the drafting of a public strategy on the employment of people with disabilities. And all of this for one single reason – to MAKE OUR SERBIA MORE BEAUTIFUL AND ITS PEOPLE HAPPIER.