

Unilever's CEO wins UN environmental award

Paul Polman, CEO of Unilever, is one of the winners of the United Nation's highest environmental accolades for leading the private sector towards sustainability.



Paul Polman, CEO of Unilever

Polman, who received the award in the Entrepreneurial Vision category, is being recognised for his bold leadership, which demonstrates that the transition to a low-carbon economy is an opportunity to be seized, not a risk to be managed.

"With his ambitious vision and personal commitment to sustainability, Polman has established a reputation for leading by example," said UNEP executive director, Achim Steiner. "As Unilever CEO, he is demonstrating the need for long-term corporate thinking that accounts for social and environmental concerns. In addition, his leadership on UN and other sustainability boards is directly influencing a sustainability shift in the corporate world beyond his own company.

"Polman's contribution to sustainability through partnerships and collaborative action embodies Goal 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals, and exemplifies the type of cooperation needed for their realisation. He has been an untiring advocate in both professional and personal capacity to make the world of business commit to being part of the solution to the manifold challenges of sustainable development."

Zero waste to landfill

As CEO of Unilever, Polman has introduced a plan to halve the environmental footprint of the manufacture and use of the company's products by 2020. Under his leadership, Unilever has already achieved zero waste to landfill across its entire global factory network, reduced the amount of CO₂ from energy and water in manufacturing by 37% and 32% respectively since 2008 and are sourcing more than half of agricultural raw materials sustainably.

"I'm deeply honoured to accept this award. As the United Nations prepares to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals and agree a global climate deal, it is more important than ever that businesses take active leadership to show that growth and sustainability are not in conflict," Polman said.

"Quite the opposite - in our experience sustainability drives growth. We have reached a tipping point for change in 2015, a once in a lifetime opportunity to end poverty and tackle climate change. But to make a real difference we need everyone on board - business, governments and NGOs. Now is the time to make this a fairer, more prosperous, more sustainable world."

The long-term perspective shown by Polman as Unilever CEO is mirrored in his work as chair of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development - an alliance of more than 200 businesses worldwide committed to creating a sustainable future for business, society and the environment.

Sustainability initiative

Hiss imprint can also be felt in the UN Global Compact - the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative - where he sits on the board. Under the Global Compact, more than 8,000 member companies have chosen to follow ten guiding principles, including those on human rights and the environment.

In his role as co-chair of the Global Consumer Goods Forum Sustainability Committee, Polman and Unilever has led the work that resulted in the Forum's commitment to net-zero deforestation by 2020.

Polman is also a member of the Commission on the New Climate Economy which aims to help governments, businesses and society make better-informed decisions on how to achieve economic prosperity and development while also addressing climate change.

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