



Remarks by Corinne Momal-Vanian, Executive Director of the Kofi Annan Foundation

On the occasion of the award ceremony and the official bestowal of the Kofi Annan Medal, a commemorative award marking the 20th anniversary of ESG for Sustainable Development – Brasilia, 27 November 2024

Excellencies, dear friends,

On behalf of the Kofi Annan Foundation, I would like to express our gratitude for being presented with this Medal. I wish I could be with you in person today, but a number of urgent tasks unfortunately prevent me of travelling to Brazil.

More generally, we greatly appreciate the decision by the ESG in Practice Parliamentary Front of the Brazilian National Congress and the Global ESG Institute to honor Kofi Annan’s legacy and his actions in favour of sustainable development and responsible socio-environmental governance through this ceremony and through this medal.

This is a very timely initiative. We are profoundly touched by this tribute to the late former Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Founding Chair of the Foundation. It is indeed fitting to honour Kofi Annan, given his pioneering work in establishing, two decades ago, the Global Compact.

Despite his legendary courtesy, his diplomatic skills and his soft voice, Kofi Annan was also an innovator and sometimes even an iconoclast. He truly broke down the barriers that prevented the private sector from playing its indispensable role in achieving first the Millennium Development Goals and later Agenda 2030. He also broke taboos, by noting that multilateral and national institutions must set up partnerships with private players to solve problems of public health, employment, and infrastructure, while calling on them to comply with international standards for human rights, labour rights or environmental protection.

And many partnerships have indeed been created over the last twenty years. But we should not take this progress for granted. ESG has yet to convince many. There are those who want to slow down the energy transition and the move away from fossil fuels, and use ESG as “greenwashing” or even attack it As state interference in private business, but there are also the growing socio-economic inequalities that have marked the last decade and which run the risk of recreating a great mistrust of the private sector.

Because we are not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. This is why the idea of working on ESG in practice is so important. The great ideas launched twenty years ago should be implemented not only in spirit but also through concrete action. As the triple crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation accelerates, we need to hold all social and economic actors responsible for their actions. Kofi Annan was never satisfied with simply issuing big declarations. He always looked at the actual impact of policies and actions on the most vulnerable people in our world.

I thank you, therefore, for this initiative and on behalf of the Kofi Annan Foundation, I wish it great success.