III. Disclosure

1. Enterprises should ensure that timely and accurate information is disclosed on all material matters regarding their activities, structure, financial situation, performance, ownership and governance. This information should be disclosed for the enterprise as a whole, and, where appropriate, along business lines or geographic areas. Disclosure policies of enterprises should be tailored to the nature, size and location of the enterprise, with due regard taken of costs, business confidentiality and other competitive concerns.

2. Disclosure policies of enterprises should include, but not be limited to, material information on:

   a) the financial and operating results of the enterprise;

   b) enterprise objectives;

   c) major share ownership and voting rights, including the structure of a group of enterprises and intra-group relations, as well as control enhancing mechanisms;

   d) remuneration policy for members of the board and key executives, and information about board members, including qualifications, the selection process, other enterprise directorships and whether each board member is regarded as independent by the board;

   e) related party transactions;

   f) foreseeable risk factors;

   g) issues regarding workers and other stakeholders;

   h) governance structures and policies, in particular, the content of any corporate governance code or policy and its implementation process.

3. Enterprises are encouraged to communicate additional information that could include:

   a) value statements or statements of business conduct intended for public disclosure including, depending on its relevance for the enterprise's activities, information on the enterprise's policies relating to matters covered by the *Guidelines*;

b) policies and other codes of conduct to which the enterprise subscribes, their date of adoption and the countries and entities to which such statements apply;

c) its performance in relation to these statements and codes;

d) information on internal audit, risk management and legal compliance systems;

e) information on relationships with workers and other stakeholders.

4. Enterprises should apply high quality standards for accounting, and financial as well as non-financial disclosure, including environmental and social reporting where they exist. The standards or policies under which information is compiled and published should be reported. An annual audit should be conducted by an independent, competent and qualified auditor in order to provide an external and objective assurance to the board and shareholders that the financial statements fairly represent the financial position and performance of the enterprise in all material respects.

Commentary on Disclosure

28. The purpose of this chapter is to encourage improved understanding of the operations of multinational enterprises. Clear and complete information on enterprises is important to a variety of users ranging from shareholders and the financial community to other constituencies such as workers, local communities, special interest groups, governments and society at large. To improve public understanding of enterprises and their interaction with society and the environment, enterprises should be transparent in their operations and responsive to the public's increasingly sophisticated demands for information.

29. The information highlighted in this chapter addresses disclosure in two areas. The first set of disclosure recommendations is identical to disclosure items outlined in the OECD Principles of Corporate Governance. Their related annotations provide further guidance and the recommendations in the *Guidelines* should be construed in relation to them. The first set of disclosure recommendations may be supplemented by a second set of disclosure recommendations which enterprises are encouraged to follow. The disclosure recommendations focus mainly on publicly traded enterprises. To the extent that they are deemed applicable in light of the nature, size and location of enterprises, they

should also be a useful tool to improve corporate governance in non-traded enterprises; for example, privately held or State-owned enterprises.

30. Disclosure recommendations are not expected to place unreasonable administrative or cost burdens on enterprises. Nor are enterprises expected to disclose information that may endanger their competitive position unless disclosure is necessary to fully inform the investment decision and to avoid misleading the investor. In order to determine what information should be disclosed at a minimum, the *Guidelines* use the concept of materiality. Material information can be defined as information whose omission or misstatement could influence the economic decisions taken by users of information.

31. The *Guidelines* also generally note that information should be prepared and disclosed in accordance with high quality standards of accounting and financial and non-financial disclosure. This significantly improves the ability of investors to monitor the enterprise by providing increased reliability and comparability of reporting, and improved insight into its performance. The annual independent audit recommended by the *Guidelines* should contribute to an improved control and compliance by the enterprise.

32. Disclosure is addressed in two areas. The first set of disclosure recommendations calls for timely and accurate disclosure on all material matters regarding the corporation, including the financial situation, performance, ownership and governance of the company. Companies are also expected to disclose sufficient information on the remuneration of board members and key executives (either individually or in the aggregate) for investors to properly assess the costs and benefits of remuneration plans and the contribution of incentive schemes, such as stock option schemes, to performance. Related party transactions and material foreseeable risk factors are additional relevant information that should be disclosed, as well as material issues regarding workers and other stakeholders.

33. The *Guidelines* also encourage a second set of disclosure or communication practices in areas where reporting standards are still evolving such as, for example, social, environmental and risk reporting. This is particularly the case with greenhouse gas emissions, as the scope of their monitoring is expanding to cover direct and indirect, current and future, corporate and product emissions; biodiversity is another example. Many enterprises provide information on a broader set of topics than financial performance and consider disclosure of such information a method by which they can demonstrate a commitment to

socially acceptable practices. In some cases, this second type of disclosure – or communication with the public and with other parties directly affected by the enterprise's activities – may pertain to entities that extend beyond those covered in the enterprise's financial accounts. For example, it may also cover information on the activities of subcontractors and suppliers or of joint venture partners. This is particularly appropriate to monitor the transfer of environmentally harmful activities to partners.

34. Many enterprises have adopted measures designed to help them comply with the law and standards of business conduct, and to enhance the transparency of their operations. A growing number of firms have issued voluntary codes of corporate conduct, which are expressions of commitments to ethical values in such areas as environment, human rights, labour standards, consumer protection, or taxation. Specialised management systems have been or are being developed and continue to evolve with the aim of helping them respect these commitments – these involve information systems, operating procedures and training requirements. Enterprises are cooperating with NGOs and intergovernmental organisations in developing reporting standards that enhance enterprises' ability to communicate how their activities influence sustainable development outcomes (for example, the Global Reporting Initiative).

35. Enterprises are encouraged to provide easy and economical access to published information and to consider making use of information technologies to meet this goal. Information that is made available to users in home markets should also be available to all interested users. Enterprises may take special steps to make information available to communities that do not have access to printed media (for example, poorer communities that are directly affected by the enterprise's activities).