

Africa: Ashish J. Thakkar Named Chair of the UN Foundation's Global Entrepreneurs Council



KAMPALA, Uganda, June 25, 2015 (Mara Foundation) -- The United Nations Foundation today announced Ashish J. Thakkar, Founder of Mara Group and Mara Foundation, will serve as Chair of the UN Foundation's Global Entrepreneurs Council (GEC). As the first African entrepreneur to lead the GEC, Thakkar will bring a unique, global perspective to the Council's mission to work with entrepreneurs to help the UN Foundation support the work of the UN.

The announcement was made during a day of commemorations during which Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon marked the 70th anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Charter in San Francisco.

Thakkar founded his first business in 1996 at the age of 15 with a \$5,000 loan. Since then, he has led the growth of Mara Group from a small IT business in Uganda to a globally recognized multi-sector investment and operating group.

Thakkar is passionate about enabling, empowering and inspiring young and women entrepreneurs, which is why he founded Mara Foundation in 2009 to foster and support emerging entrepreneurs through mentorship and venture philanthropy. One of the initiatives, Mara Mentor, is an online platform and mobile app that connects ambitious entrepreneurs with experienced and inspiring business leaders, and encourages idea and knowledge sharing amongst their peer group.

"I have been fortunate to work with some wonderfully impressive entrepreneurs in Africa and globally. Working with the UN Foundation provides me an opportunity to work with like-minded leaders and entrepreneurs. I passionately believe that by working together we will create a thriving environment that can impact entrepreneurs in every country of the world," said Thakkar. "The Foundation gives me a new platform to drive progress on the issues that matter."

The UN Foundation's Global Entrepreneurs Council was established in 2011 as a strategic advisory board of high-profile entrepreneurs under the age of 45 who have made a commitment to helping find innovative solutions to global challenges.

As Chair, Thakkar will be positioned to provide thought leadership on key global issues. His commitment to empowering girls and women entrepreneurs aligns with the Foundation's strategy and programmatic priorities. His appointment signals a commitment to working with leaders from around the world to tackle challenges that know no borders. For the first time, the office of the Chair will be located outside the United States in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

"Partnering with Ashish means the UN Foundation will benefit from his incredible experience as we work with entrepreneurs to bring new expertise to UN causes," said UN Foundation COO, Rick Parnell. "Thakkar's record speaks for itself: Mara Group employs more than 11,000 people across 22 countries working in sectors from financial services to technology. As we continue to expand UN Foundation projects with the entrepreneurial sector, Ashish's expertise, connections, and leadership will enable us develop programs that truly improve lives around the world."

"A multi-sector, integrated approach is necessary to drive sustainable development outcomes over the next 15 years," said Kathy Calvin, President and CEO of UN Foundation. "Ashish's involvement will inspire other private sector leaders to engage in creating positive change."

Thakkar takes the role over from Elizabeth Gore, the Entrepreneur-in-Residence at Dell. Gore previously served as the UN Foundation's Entrepreneur-in-Residence and as the Foundation's Vice President of Global Partnerships. In that capacity she led the formation of the GEC and helped steered the first four years of its work.

For more information on the UN Foundation's Global Entrepreneurs Council, see www.unfoundation.org/GEC.

About the United Nations Foundation

The United Nations Foundation builds public-private partnerships to address the world's most pressing problems, and broadens support for the United Nations through advocacy and public outreach. Through innovative campaigns and initiatives, the Foundation connects people, ideas, and resources to help the UN solve global problems. The Foundation was created in 1998 as a U.S. public charity by entrepreneur and philanthropist Ted Turner and now is supported by global corporations, foundations, governments, and individuals. Learn more at www.unfoundation.org.

About Ashish J. Thakkar

Ashish is the Founder of the Mara Group and the Mara Foundation. Through its investments and operations, Mara Group now employs over 11,000 people across 22 African countries in sectors spanning technology, financial services, infrastructure, and real estate. Ashish is passionate about enabling, empowering and inspiring young and women entrepreneurs. To that end, in 2009, he founded Mara Foundation to foster and support emerging entrepreneurs through mentorship and venture philanthropy.

Being a global thought leader on entrepreneurship, Ashish is a member of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Africa and was recently awarded the Future Awards 'Young Leader' Award. In 2014, Ashish also won the MTV Base Leadership Award and was one of the first Africans to be featured in Fortune's 40 under 40 list. Ashish advises several heads of state in Sub-Saharan Africa, and sits on Dell's Global Advisory Board and the Board of 'The Africa Center', a creative space on New York's Fifth Avenue which has a vision of becoming Africa's embassy to the world based. (END)

