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`Don't punish private enterprises for fault of a few'

PRIVATE enterprises do not deserve to be castigated for the excesses of a few, said Christopher Beale of the UK-based Institute of Directors.

He acknowledged the terrible harm done by companies such as Enron Corp, WorldCom Inc and others in recent months, but stressed that they were not representatives of other businesses.

"We cannot assume that they (the multinationals) are all bad, paying only lip service to an ideal.

"Surely, the inward investment of multinationals had moved well beyond the predatory concept.

"If companies don't take into account local needs, they cannot and should not survive," he said at a dinner in conjunction with the Global 2002 - International Smart Partnership Dialogue.

In his speech on "Globalisation, the New Realities: Multinationals - Exploiters or Partners?", Beale said although the problems were still enormous, the world had now become a better place.

Quoting former anarchist Johan Norberg in his book In Defence of Global Capitalism, he said capitalism was far from evil in its global form and was a force of freedom.

Beale said businesses could be seen as heroes and not villains if global capitalism responded to problems with imagination and creativity.

He said if this could be realised, it would bring global capitalism a little closer to the vision of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

In Tokyo last year, Dr Mahathir said that "there could be total oppression of the weak by the strong as capitalism runs riot, or there could be a world democracy where the resources of the world are combined with human ingenuity to create the greatest human civilisation ever".

The Institute of Directors is a body tasked to work with the government of the day to create an environment that is good for business, stimulate the entrepreneurial spirit, sustain a healthy and growing economy and create wealth for the good of society as a whole.

The institute has more than 70,000 members worldwide, 56,000 of them in Britain.