

What Obama's inauguration speech means for CSR?

By Wayne Visser

Having just watched the inauguration of Obama, it is hard not to feel that we have just witnessed a geopolitical (perhaps even a psycho-spiritual) shift. But what will this mean for corporate sustainability and responsibility?

The speech was notable from a CSR perspective in a number of ways:

1. Obama's acknowledgement of the irresponsibility of capital markets and the need to regulate them, which should lead to some reigning in of "casino capitalism";
2. Obama's repeated mention (twice I think) of the need to invest in renewables (although I also noticed the "harness the soil" comment, which presumably means fossil fuels);
3. Obama's emotional identification with the marginalised populations of the US and the world, which should lead to a prioritisation of social issues; and
4. Obama's clear desire for America to demonstrate its leadership in the world, including in the area of climate change, which should lead to progress in the post-Kyoto deal.

Then again, as one BBC commentator pointed out, Obama needs to convince us all that he is not just good at words, but at actions as well. The next 100 days will, I believe, give us a much clearer picture of Obama's likely influence on the global CSR agenda.

(For those interesting in something a bit more creative on the subject, I have written a new poem about Obama's inauguration, which is posted here:

<http://waynevisser.blogspot.com/2009/01/poem-on-obamas-inauguration.html>)

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