Symposium Reflects on Business Ethics

MORE THAN 300 ACADEMICS, business practitioners, and government officials from across Asia gathered last May at a conference center in Surabaya, Indonesia, for a series of discussions on business ethics in the global economy.

The invitation-only event, presented by the Sekar Group and BU’s Questrom School of Business and organized by the Questrom-based Harry Susilo Institute for Ethics in the Global Economy, featured speeches, panels, and small-group discussions on the relationship between business ethics and a sustainable business environment—with the added challenge of crossing borders and blending cultures thrown into the mix.

“When you pull together such a diverse group, you have to wonder whether the dialogue is going to be productive,” says Kenneth Freeman, Allen Questrom Professor and Dean of Questrom School of Business, who attended the conference. “Will people find common ground and move the debate forward? The answer, in this case, was a resounding yes—so much so that planning is now under way for the second symposium in the series, which will be held in Boston next June.”

Also at the conference was Jonathan Lehrich, Questrom associate dean for executive education, who says he was impressed by the symposium’s spirit of sincere reflection on ethics in the global economy. “Speakers, panelists, honored guests—all came to the event not to brag or condemn, but to listen, learn, and lead,” he says.

The Susilo Institute was established in 2014 through a generous gift from Indonesian businessman Harry Susilo, founder and chair of the Sekar Group, an Indonesia-based manufacturer in the food and fisheries sectors and also involved in trading, finance, and tourism. Drawing on the resources of Questrom School of Business and engaging faculties from research centers across Asia and the world, the institute sponsors symposia, develops teaching materials, and supports programming aimed at conveying lessons in global ethics, with a focus on linking Western and Eastern ethical frameworks.

Susilo is the father of Finna Susilo (Questrom’98) and Fanni Susilo (CAS’00), and serves on both the Questrom Dean’s Asia Advisory Board and the President’s International Advisory Board.

One highlight for those in attendance from BU came when President Robert A. Brown formally inducted Susilo into the William Fairfield Warren Society, which honors the University’s most generous and visionary donors. “We are very fortunate to have the support and wise counsel of an international business leader who understands the vital importance of sound ethical principles in the world of enterprise,” Brown says. “As we learned during the symposium, Harry’s wisdom and insight complement and reinforce his philanthropy. We are grateful that we have the opportunity to place business ethics at the forefront of international discussions.”

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