

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Substantive Session (Geneva, 2 to 27 July 2001)

*The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is composed of 54 member States elected for three-year terms, and meets annually for a four-week session, alternating between New York and Geneva. In 2001, its substantive session was held in Geneva. The members of the Economic and Social Council's (ECOSOC) Bureau for 2001 are as follows: Ambassador Martin Belinga-Eboutou (Cameroon) as **President**; and Ambassadors Ivan Simonovi (Croatia), Bernd Niehaus (Costa Rica), Mikhail Wehbe (Syria) and Francisco Seixas da Costa (Portugal) as **Vice Presidents**.*

1. High-level segment

The main topic of the high-level segment of the ECOSOC's substantive session of 2001 was "*The role of the United Nations in supporting the efforts of African countries to achieve sustainable development*", based upon the report of the Secretary-General of the same name (E/2001/83).

The high-level segment was attended by heads of the UN specialised agencies and multilateral financial institutions, governmental officials at the ministerial level and other public and private sector representatives. African investment roundtables were held throughout much of the high-level segment, attracting dignitaries and various business interests.

In his address to the session, Mr **Kofi Annan**, UN Secretary-General, outlined points covered in his report. He called for the developed countries to be "*Africa's advocates*" by co-operating with African countries and the New African Initiative (NAI). The NAI was adopted at the Heads of States Summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), Lusaka, July 2001. It is a multilateral agreement amongst African nations to set and observe a series of principles for economic and social progress. The Secretary-General also called upon all States to support measures to eliminate the small arms trade, a pressing problem for African countries.

Mr **Horst Köhler**, President of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), expressed his support for the NAI and also reiterated the long-standing policy of the IMF against total debt relief. Mr **Mike Moore**, Director-General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), stated that his organisation assists African countries with better access to markets throughout the world and improved systems for trade. He called upon UN member States to assist Africa by supporting a new round of upcoming trade negotiations in Doha, Qatar. Mr **Rubens Ricupero**, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), spoke of the need to provide more aid, in order to "*make aid superfluous*". He insisted upon a course of action for Africa, invoking the example set by the Marshall Plan.

Mr **Nelson Mandela**, former President of South Africa, speaking live via satellite video link, stated that Africans must take on responsibility and assume full ownership of the process of development. He further expressed the necessity for partnerships between developed countries, multi-lateral organisations and private enterprise. Mrs **Sadako Ogata**, the former UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), expressed the need for rehabilitation and reconstruction in post-conflict situations. By their very nature, large displacements of refugees and the internally displaced hamper development.

The debates in the high-level segment were dominated by a focus on investment and private sector solutions to ensure African development. The year 2015 was generally posited by many delegations to be the target for dramatic results in alleviating poverty throughout the continent. A member of the Moroccan delegation, however, recognised this target date, as well as other deadlines mentioned, as unfeasible.

In the course of the three-day high-level segment, **human rights were rarely mentioned**. Besides the statement of Dr **Ludger Volmer**, Minister of State in the Federal

Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Germany, who stated that "*perhaps the most important factor (in the process of African development) is respect for human rights*", there was very little or no explicit emphasis paid to specific human rights issues. Instead, the concepts of "*good governance*", "*public-private partnerships*" and "*accountability*" were extensively referred to. The primary focus of the high-level segment was upon business and investment, as evident by the business forums organised. For the most part, the main goal of the high-level segment was to gain additional overseas development assistance (ODA) rather than serving the cause of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

On attendance and interest by African States

Mr **Hage Geingob**, Prime Minister of Namibia, was the highest-ranking member of government from an African country in attendance. With the exception of the Namibian Prime Minister, the other delegations at the high-level segment were represented by Foreign Ministers, Deputy Foreign Ministers and, often, junior ranking ministers or, more often, Ambassadors. On the morning of 17 July 2001, Mr **Sule Namido**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nigeria, speaking on behalf of Mr **Olusegun Obasanjo**, President of Nigeria (who cancelled his scheduled appearance quite unexpectedly), delivered the day's keynote address. Mr **Thabo Mbeki**, President of South Africa, was also scheduled to appear but did not make it. This poor attendance by the architects of the NAI (Mbeki, Obasanjo and Mr **Abdelaziz Bouteflika**, President of Algeria) may be explained by the fact the ECOSOC's high-level segment overlapped with the OAU meeting (from which emerged the NAI) in Lusaka and the Group of Eight Meeting (G-8) in Genoa, Italy. Since the NAI troika were invited at the last minute to brief the leaders of the seven largest industrialised countries plus the Russian Federation, this may explain why they did not attend the high-level segment, sending ministers or ambassadors instead.

At the close of the debates, a draft ministerial declaration was distributed and adopted by consensus. The Declaration calls upon the international community to support the recently adopted NAI. In this vein, the Secretary-General is invited to "*take the requisite measures to ensure an effective and co-ordinated response of the United Nations to support the Initiative*" (OP 5). Delegates also recognise the link between peace, democracy, national efforts towards the promotion of good governance, respect for human rights and sustainable development. To operationalise this link a number of recommendations are specified, including the mobilisation of political support and resources for implementing the various African UN poverty eradication programmes and initiatives; enhancing the capacity of African Governments to strengthen the links between economic and social dimensions of poverty reduction strategies; and to support African countries in promoting economic and social policies that are "*pro-poor and gender sensitive*" (OP 8, c).

Space in the draft ministerial declaration is also devoted to the ongoing HIV/AIDS pandemic. Delegates resolve *inter alia* to assist Africa in building its capacity to tackle the HIV/AIDS pandemic as well as other infectious diseases; and call upon all funds, programmes and agencies are to mainstream HIV/AIDS prevention into their activities.

2. Co-ordination segment

The theme of the co-ordination segment concerned the role of the UN system in **promoting development**, especially relating to **technology transfer** from developed to developing countries. This was in particular light of the gap between the developing countries in access to information and communication technologies, commonly referred to as the "**digital divide**". The co-ordination segment was a continuation of the work begun by the UN Millennium Declaration of 2000, the International Development Targets, and notably the report of the Secretary-General on "*The role of the United Nations in promoting development, particularly with respect to access to and transfer of knowledge and technology, especially information*

and communication technologies, inter alia, through partnerships with relevant stakeholders, including the private sector" (E/2001/59). Furthermore, General Assembly resolution 55/215 had required the ECOSOC's substantive session of 2001 to discuss partnerships and possible avenues to develop partnerships between "*relevant stakeholders*".

Speakers included individuals from both the public sector, including various UN agencies, some NGOs, and the private sector. Mr **Philippe Queau**, Director of the Information Society Division of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) made particular reference to the lack of access to drugs of those suffering from HIV/AIDS in South Africa due to the patents on pharmaceuticals, often held by multinational corporations based in developed countries.

In the statement issued by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Group of 77 – a group of 133 developing countries (G-77) - and China, concern was expressed over the general disenfranchisement of developing countries in the fields of information and communication technology. The statement sought to identify the disparity in technological development as needing: greater capacity building; a substantial increase in technology transfer and education; and an increase in overseas development assistance flows. The representatives of China, Venezuela, Fiji, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bahrain and South Africa, amongst others, highlighted their problems related to further marginalisation in the world economy in taking advantage of the new developments in information technology.

On the evening of 4 July 2001, ECOSOC published its final conclusions in "*Agreed conclusions of the co-ordination segment*", highlighting the major points, which include the need for partnerships between "*relevant stakeholders*" – the UN, its specialised agencies, members of the public sector and, notably, the private sector. All member States, whether hailing from developed or developing countries, agreed upon "*the need to protect intellectual property rights and importance of international trade and FDI in transferring technology to developing countries*".

3. Operational activities segment

The operational activities segment began with a review of international development co-operation and the Secretary-General's reports. This was followed by a high-level policy discussion with the Heads of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP). These reviews and discussions were followed by a review of the UN development system's involvement in China and Tanzania.

The basis for the operational activities segment was the policy recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the "*Triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities of the United Nations system for development*" (E/2001/66) and the report of the Secretary-General on the "*Progress in the implementation of the multi-year funding frameworks and evaluation of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework*" (E/2001/58 - A/56/70). The ECOSOC unanimously adopted this policy review.

Some speakers like the Australian and the Iranian delegates (on behalf of G-77) stated that improved effectiveness was more or less reliant upon increased funding for programmes, as reduced funding and donor fatigue have stretched many UN programmes to the limits. The resident co-ordinator system was criticised for gender imbalance. A point that was underscored by the **Norwegian** Ambassador and Mr **Mark Malloch Brown**, the Administrator of **UNDP**, amongst others. Ms **Catherine Bertini**, Executive Director of the **WFP**, made an impassioned plea for UN relief activities to be "*infused with the principles of development*" which, in turn, tackle the "*root causes of crises*".

There were two country reports delivered by respective panels of experts on the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) resident co-ordinator scheme during the operational segment: China and Tanzania. The report on **China** focused primarily on promoting sustainable development and reducing disparities in wealth, but also covered other issues such as national economic and political reforms and promotion of regional equality and

gender equality. Ms Lanyan Chen, Gender Adviser for the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in China, reported that it directly influenced the inclusion of provisions against domestic violence against women, as attached to a national marriage law. The report on **Tanzania** stressed national ownership and government leadership of the UNDAF to develop the country.

4. Humanitarian segment

At its organisational segment for 2001, it was decided that the theme of the humanitarian affairs segment of the substantive session would be "*Strengthening the co-ordination of the emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations*", addressing both situations of natural disasters and other "complex" emergencies. A number of UN bodies and specialised agencies addressed the ECOSOC under this agenda item including the WFP, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the UNPFA, and the UNICEF. Other notable speakers included the High Commissioner for Refugees, the Emergency Relief Co-ordinator, the Resident Co-ordinators for El Salvador, Afghanistan and Mongolia, and the Special Envoy on the Drought in the Greater Horn of Africa. Representatives of the *International Committee of the Red Cross* (ICRC) were also present

At the opening of the segment, an annual report on the Co-ordination of Emergency Assistance by the **Emergency Relief Co-ordinator** was presented. Mr Kenzo Oshima noted two key concerns: the need to prevent loss of life during natural disasters: and to protect civilians during situations of armed conflict. He further outlined a number of areas where he believed improvements to humanitarian work could be made: the need to strengthen national and local capacity to respond to natural disasters; and the need to respond to the issues of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The need to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian workers in the field was also identified.

In the following debate, a number of issues in relation to humanitarian and emergency relief work were raised. Many countries expressed concern at the rise in natural disasters and armed conflicts and some stated that they believed the UN had not responded effectively to the challenges arising from this. Representatives from developing countries generally noted the need to address the issue of underdevelopment as this both exacerbated the effects of natural disasters and was at the root of many armed conflicts. The need for humanitarian assistance to be provided according to the principles of neutrality, objectivity, integrity, State sovereignty and non-politicisation and only at the request of the government concerned, especially with regard to assistance for IDPs, was also emphasised by some of these delegations.

A number of States also emphasised the need to provide assistance after the emergency in order to support reconstruction. Several speakers also suggested further shortcomings in current humanitarian work including the need for greater funding, the need for a gender sensitive approach, the lack of co-ordination between the various agencies and actors involved in disaster response and the need to utilise technology more effectively to respond to such situations. Most delegations shared the Emergency Relief Co-ordinator's concerns at attacks specifically targeting humanitarian workers and emphasised the need for better legal and field support for staff.

The issue of creating a **legally binding instrument** in the area of search and rescue was also raised by a number of speakers. Delegates from Latin American countries, in particular, spoke in support of this initiative. A number of speakers also expressed concern that the humanitarian segment would not be adopting a set of conclusions this year but rather would be adopting a Chairperson's summary at the closure of the session. A number of speakers emphasised that they hoped this would not be a precedent for future years and of the need for confidence building measures in order to reduce politicisation of the humanitarian segment.

Panel discussions were also held during the three days on the issues of "*Natural disaster preparedness and response measures*" and "*Emergency humanitarian assistance for*

groups with special needs". These generally consisted of presentations made on particular country situations and the humanitarian work going on within them. Much reference to the issues of safety and security of humanitarian workers was made during the resulting debates, with general questions about the presentations also being addressed to the relevant speakers.

Throughout the humanitarian segment very little explicit reference to human rights was made. In fact, at one point, a notable speaker made reference to the need to stop discussion of human rights and to instead focus on the need for practical response measures.

5. General segment

During the general segment of the ECOSOC a panel discussion was held on the Charter for Public Services in Africa. Discussions also took place on very different topics such as HIV/AIDS; globalisation; the situation in Palestine; regional co-operation; economic and environmental issues; social development; narcotic drugs; crime prevention and criminal justice.

More than 120 decisions, 51 of which were submitted by the 57th session of the Commission on Human Rights, were adopted; four of them by recorded vote. Many of those adopted also concerned the Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission on Sustainable Development, and the Commission for Social Development, which is acting as the preparatory committee for the Second World Assembly on Ageing.

Among those adopted was the decision to convene the first annual session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at the UN headquarters in New York from 6 to 17 May 2002 without establishing a precedent regarding any possible future location of the Forum.

On forced labour in Myanmar (Burma)

The issue of forced labour in Myanmar entered the ECOSOC's 2001 agenda during its general segment on 19 July 2001 in the form of a draft resolution instructing the Secretary-General to report to the Security Council on the conclusions of an International Labour Organisation (ILO) fact-finding mission.

The draft resolution, entitled "*Developments concerning the question of the observance by the Government of Myanmar of the International Labour Organisation Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)*", noted the: ILO initiative to end forced labour in Myanmar; agreement between both parties to create a fact-finding mission aiming at "*the complete elimination of forced labour in law and practice*"; and the ILO Governing Body's report on the matter due to be delivered in November 2001.

On 2 July 2001, Ms **Jana Zikmundova**, Counsellor of **Belgium** speaking on behalf of the **European Union (EU)**, raised the issue of forced labour in Myanmar. This statement was made as part of a collaborative effort between the EU and ILO. It took many days for diplomats from **EU** member-States, the **United States of America**, some **Latin American States** and others to break an impasse orchestrated primarily by **Myanmar**, **China** and **Pakistan**. As part of the compromise, no debate over the issue of forced labour in Myanmar would be held and the resolution was adopted without a vote.

The ECOSOC also: demands that Israel fully comply with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to protect the rights of Palestinian women and their children; recommends that the General Assembly at its 56th session take a decision on the question of enlarging the membership of the Executive Committee of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees from 58 to 61 States. The ECOSOC also decides to adopt as one of its themes for the next session the contribution of human resources development, including in the area of health and education, to the process of development.