



## United Nations Economic and Social Council IN SESSION 2008



## United Nations Economic and Social Council IN SESSION 1946



## Palais des Nations Geneva, Switzerland

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Economic and Social Council

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Economic &  
Social Affairs



# ECOSOC

FROM GLOBAL COMMITMENT TO NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION

## United Nations Economic and Social Council



United Nations

# What is ECOSOC

## Functions and Powers

In the economic and social fields, the United Nations promotes:

- Higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development;
- Solutions of international economic, social, health, and related problems;
- International cultural and educational cooperation; and
- Universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.

Responsibility for discharging these functions is vested in the General Assembly and, under its authority, in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

ECOSOC serves as the central forum for the discussion of international economic, social, humanitarian and environmental issues, and for formulating policy recommendations addressed to Member States and the United Nations system. Through these discussions, the Council plays a key role in fostering international cooperation for development and in setting priorities for action.

The Council also coordinates the economic, social and related work of the United Nations Funds, Programmes and Specialized Agencies — known as the United Nations family of organizations.

The functions and powers of the Economic and Social Council as defined in the United Nations Charter (Chapter X) are, primarily, to:

- Make or initiate studies and reports with respect to international economic, social, cultural, educational, health, and related matters and make recommendations with respect to any such matters to the General Assembly, to the Members of the United Nations, and to the Specialized Agencies concerned.
- Make recommendations for the purpose of promoting respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.
- Prepare draft conventions for submission to the General Assembly, with respect to matters falling within its competence.
- Call, in accordance with the rules prescribed by the United Nations, international conferences on matters falling within its competence.
- Co-ordinate the activities of the Specialized Agencies through consultation with and

## What is ECOSOC: Functions and Powers (continued)

recommendations to such agencies and through recommendations to the General Assembly and to the Members of the United Nations.

- Furnish information to the Security Council and assist the Security Council upon its request.

## How ECOSOC is structured

The Economic and Social Council has 54 members, elected for three-year terms by the General Assembly, with their terms expiring on 31 December. Eighteen members of ECOSOC are elected each year. The pattern for the geographical distribution of seats is as follows: 14 members from African states; 11 from Asian states; six from Eastern European states; 10 from Latin American and Caribbean states; and 13 from Western European and Other states.

Each year, at the commencement of its first meeting, ECOSOC elects its Bureau, composed of a President and four Vice-Presidents.

The role of the President of ECOSOC is to chair the meetings, facilitate the organization of discussions, take initiatives in that respect and propose them for the approval of the Council, and facilitate consensus on issues on the ECOSOC agenda.

The Bureau's main functions are to propose the agenda, draw up a programme of work and organize the session with the support of the United Nations Secretariat. The Bureau of ECOSOC includes one Government from each of five regional groups within the United Nations. Each year, a representative from a region is chosen, on the principle of rotation, to head the Council as its President.

## How ECOSOC works

The Council holds several short sessions, ad hoc meetings, round tables and panel discussions with the participation of non-governmental stakeholders throughout the year, to prepare for its four-week substantive session in July.

The work of the Council is also carried out by its subsidiary and related bodies, including, among others:

### The functional Commissions:

- Statistical Commission;
- Commission on Population and Development;
- Commission for Social Development;
- Commission on the Status of Women;
- Commission on Narcotic Drugs;
- Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice;

- Commission on Science and Technology for Development;
- Commission on Sustainable Development; and
- United Nations Forum on Forests

### The Regional Commissions:

- Economic Commission for Africa;
- Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific;
- Economic Commission for Europe;
- Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; and
- Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

### July session

The General Assembly decided that ECOSOC, with effect from February 1992, would hold one substantive session annually between May and July, to take place in alternate years in New York and Geneva. The substantive session is organized in five segments:

- ➊ The four-day High-level Segment, with ministerial participation, is devoted to a thematic debate on major economic, social and environmental policy issues. The High-level Segment also features a high-level policy dialogue with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development on current developments in the world economy. From 2007 onwards, the High-level Segment features the Annual Ministerial Review and from 2008, the biennial Development Cooperation Forum. A Ministerial Declaration is generally adopted which provides policy guidance and recommendations for action.
- ➋ The Coordination Segment aims at ensuring that policies, programme, operational work and country frameworks of all United Nations system organizations, including the Bretton Woods institutions, are consistent with key development goals, through collaborative reviews of progress and monitoring of results. The Coordination Segment is also the main venue where the Council addresses the follow-up by the United Nations system to major United Nations conferences and summits, including the 2005 World Summit, in support of the implementation of the UN development agenda.
- ➌ The Operational Activities Segment provides the United Nations system with overall guidance on priorities and strategies for implementing the policies formulated by the General Assembly in the field of operational activities. The Segment also monitors the division of labour between and cooperation within bodies of the United Nations sys

tem, including the Funds and Programmes, and reviews and evaluates the reports of these bodies with a view to enhancing the operational activities of the United Nations on a system-wide basis.

➍ The Humanitarian Affairs Segment provides an important forum for review of the humanitarian affairs activities of the system and for their coordination. It also focuses on the continuum between relief, reconstruction and longer-term development.

➎ The General Segment is the venue for the management and oversight function of the Council. The Segment undertakes the follow-up and review of conferences; reviews the reports of the Specialized Agencies requested by the Council; and reviews and evaluates the annual reports of the Funds and Programmes, the subsidiary bodies, including the functional and regional commissions, expert bodies and ad hoc bodies, such as the Advisory Groups for countries emerging from conflict, and takes relevant action.

### New functions of ECOSOC

At the 2005 World Summit, Heads of State and Government recognized the need for a more effective ECOSOC and mandated the Council to hold **Annual Ministerial Reviews (AMR)** and a biennial **Development Cooperation Forum (DCF)**, to be organized under the framework of the High-level Segment of ECOSOC.

The overall objective of the AMR is to advance and assess progress made in the implementation of the UN development agenda, including the MDGs, defined through a series of landmark UN conferences and summits held since the 1990s. By serving as a high-level forum for political engagement and knowledge exchange, the Review aims to advance implementation by promoting synergies and linkages and by identifying lessons learned and successful practices and approaches which merit scaling up.

The objective of the DCF is to enhance the coherence and effectiveness of activities of different development partners. By reviewing trends and progress in international development cooperation, the Forum is to provide policy guidance and recommendations to improve the quality and impact of development cooperation.

## Special High-level Meeting of ECOSOC with the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

Beginning in 1998, the Council established a tradition of meeting each April with finance ministers participating in committees of the Bretton Woods institutions. These consultations initiated inter-institutional cooperation that paved

the way for the success of the International Conference on Financing for Development, held in March 2002 in Monterrey, Mexico. At that event, ECOSOC was assigned a primary role in monitoring and assessing follow-up to the Monterrey Consensus adopted by the conference.

These meetings have been considered important for deepening the dialogue between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions, and for strengthening their partnership for achieving the development goals agreed at the global conferences of the nineties. Participation in the meetings has broadened since the initial meeting in 1998.

## ECOSOC and Peacebuilding

The Economic and Social Council has played an "avant-garde" role in developing mechanisms to respond to the problems facing by countries emerging from conflict and thus helping to prevent the deterioration of human security.

In 2002, the Council established the ECOSOC Ad Hoc Advisory Groups to help define long-term programmes of support for countries emerging from conflict and created two groups on Guinea-Bissau (created in October 2002) and on Burundi (created in July 2003). While the mandates of the two Groups have been terminated as the peacebuilding challenges of these countries are now being addressed by the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), the Council retains its role in providing advice to Haiti on a long-term development strategy to promote socio-economic recovery and stability through the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti. The first Advisory Group on Haiti was created in response to a request by the Security Council, using Article 65 of the United Nations Charter to request advice from ECOSOC.

The General Assembly in its resolutions 60/180 and 61/16 affirmed the importance of interaction between the Economic and Social Council and the Peacebuilding Commission and underlined the value of the experience of ECOSOC in the area of post-conflict peacebuilding.

## Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

The Council consults with civil society groups, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector, and is the main body that recommends consultative status to NGOs. Over 3,000 NGOs from around the world now enjoy consultative status with ECOSOC. The organizations are allowed to participate, present written contribution and make statements to the Council and its subsidiary bodies.