



Remarks

By

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At:

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*“Ebola: A Threat to sustainable development”***

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The ECOSOC Chamber, UN Headquarters

Thank you for inviting me to be a discussant in this highly timely and extremely important ECOSOC Special Meeting on Ebola as a threat to sustainable development.

In his opening remarks today, the Secretary-General mentioned that the ECOSOC has a significant role to play in identifying actions that the international community and the United Nations could take to address the Ebola pandemic and other pandemics in a coordinated and coherent manner.

As we all know, Security Council's resolution 2177 adopted on 18 September 2014, which was sponsored by 134 member states, considered the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) a threat to international peace and security. The General Assembly in its resolution 69/1, dated 23 September 2014, sponsored by 154 states, approved the Secretary-General's proposal to establish UNMEER and underscored the urgent need to contain this public health crisis owing to its possible grave humanitarian, economic and social consequences.

This raises the question, what role can the ECOSOC play to address this severe emergency in the health area, which can reverse the gains made by the affected countries in areas of peace building, political stability and the reconstruction of socioeconomic infrastructure in recent years (PP3 of Res.69/1) and could halt the ability of the affected countries and regions to achieve the MDG's, to embark on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and to be an active beneficiary of the post 2015 development agenda at the global level, and the African Union ambitious transformative agenda 2063 at the regional level.

Having listened attentively to the presentations made by Dr. Chan (WHO), Dr. Nabarro, Mr. Hamdok from ECA, the distinguished representatives of the affected countries and by our panellists representing a wide-range of stockholders in our fight against Ebola, and benefitting from my past experience as Vice President of ECOSOC in 2012 in charge *interalia* of integration and coordination, and current experience as the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Africa, allow me to share with you some concrete proposals that could be considered, along with other proposals, with a view to developing a possible roadmap that could be adopted by

the Economic and Social Council, in its spring coordination and management session.

Such roadmap should naturally be developed in close cooperation with the African Union, the Regional Economic Communities in the five sub-regions, in particular ECOWAS, at this juncture, as well as all UN entities that are dealing with this crisis, in the field and at Headquarters, particularly in light of what Dr. Chan just mentioned that 22 African countries have the ecological and other conditions for possible Ebola outbreak. This roadmap should also be based on regional and international assessments of the economic and social impacts of Ebola, including, but not limited to, the World Bank's report on "the Economic Impact of the 2014 Ebola Epidemic: short and medium term estimates for west Africa" and its updates, and the similar reports published by ECA, AfDB, IMF, just to mention a few, and I hope I am not missing any other reports!!!

It would be beneficial that this road map contain concrete measures at short, medium and long terms.

Among the short-term measures that could be considered:

1. Strong encouragement for debt relief and concessional loans to be provided to all affected countries by IFI's and other creditors. The IMF has already taken the lead as recognized by the recent G20 Summit, making available a further \$300 million to stem the Ebola outbreak and ease pressures on Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, through a combination on concessional loans, debt relief and grants, and the ECOSOC is the right forum to encourage many others to do the same. Naturally, this has to extend to other countries that might have new Ebola cases, such as Mali as we have just heard.
2. As the Ebola crisis revealed the existence of weak health systems in the affected countries and in many other parts in Africa, the United Nations, IFI's and other donor countries should consider supporting logistically and financially the establishment of the African Centre for disease control and prevention, established pursuant to the African Summit decision in the

Malabo Summit, and make sure it is equipped with the latest technologies necessary to prevent and effectively deal with Ebola and any pandemic in the future, as was elaborated today by the High representative of the AU Chairperson.

This matter will be on the agenda of the next African Union Summit, and this would provide the United Nations and the international community an opportunity to show solidarity with Africa.

Sub-regional health facilities could similarly play important preventive and immediate response roles if equipped properly. They can also assist in strengthening health care capabilities in Africa and increase preparedness for such crises in the future. I refer here to the West African Health Organization (WAHO) which is striving to play a role even though it is hampered by lack of financial resources. WHO could increase the support to the establishment and operationalization of those sub-regional health organizations to train and equip large numbers of health workers on the ground, thus creating a new cadre of community health workers capable of dealing with the current and future pandemics and the United Nations system, through ECOSOC, should play a significant role in consolidating this effort as well.

3. As the six countries currently on the PBC agenda are African countries (Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, CAR and Guinea Bissau) and taking duly into consideration the fragile situation of countries emerging from conflict, closer coordination between ECOSOC and the PBC in addressing the economic, humanitarian and social impacts of Ebola in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone will be essential to maintain the nexus between peace and security on one side and development on the other. This coordination role by ECOSOC should also expand to include countries that are not in conflict or post-conflict situation.
4. As the African Union Summit in January 2015 will also consider the list of recommendations, to be presented by the Chairperson of the AU Commission, related to financial and economic measures to be adopted and

implemented at national, regional and continental levels in Africa, as well as economic and financial measures that the international community and institutions at large are called upon to consider and apply. (Executive Council decision No.1 of 8 September 2014). In this regard, there is no doubt that early consultations with the African Union and active participation in drafting and implementing those recommendations will be imperative to ECOSOC, the United Nations and other stockholders.

At the medium-term to long-term, proposals could include:

1. The establishment of public - private partnerships to improve access to quality healthcare services in poor resource setting, including to support health institutions in African countries. And here, I suggest that the ECOSOC Partnerships Forum next year (2015) dedicate sometime to this issue.
2. The creation of a United Nations interagency task force at country level, to be led by the Resident Coordinators to help strengthen the public health systems in the affected countries and throughout Africa. Those Task Forces should report to ECOSOC periodically, similar to the interagency Task Force on Non-Communicable Diseases which also report to ECOSOC.
3. The establishment by ECOSOC of an intergovernmental mechanism on emergencies, which could serve as an early warning system and help mobilize a coordinated response to future emergencies, including health and natural disasters, in a manner that would complement the coordinated approach by the United Nations system. The goals here are to (1) complement existing coordination mechanisms, such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and the Global Platform for Disaster Reduction and (2) mobilize and coordinate the efforts of members states, stakeholders and the international community at large. The need for such a mechanism is becoming very acute, and immediate steps need to be taken immediately.

These are some reflections on how can the ECOSOC, as a principal organ of the United Nations, play a leading role in addressing the economic and social impacts of Ebola and in enhancing preparedness towards future outbreaks and disasters.

I thank you.