

Informal summary

Coordination Segment 2009 Economic and Social Council

Panel discussion on “The role of the UN system in promoting sustainable development in the context of current challenges” 10 July 2009, Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

Chair: **H.E. Mr. Somduth Soborun**, Vice-President of ECOSOC
Panelists: **Mr. Michel Jarraud**, Secretary-General of WMO
Ms. Anika Soder, Assistant Director-General, Office of the UN
Cooordination and MDG Follow-up, FAO and the vice-Chair of the UN
Development Group
Mr. Christophe Bouvier, Director, Regional Office for Europe of UNEP
Moderator: **Mr. Thomas Stelzer**, the Assistant Secretary-General for Policy
Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs of the UN DESA

In his introductory remarks, **H.E. Mr. Somduth Soborun** noted that the UN system plays an important role in promoting the concept of sustainable development and in helping countries develop effective strategies. From Rio to Johannesburg, then to the 2005 World Summit, the UN has developed a comprehensive framework for sustainable development, supporting an integrated approach to the economic, social and environmental dimensions. He described, however, that despite a broad international consensus around this framework, its implementation still remains elusive. He noted that on the contrary, the global financial and economic crisis, along with other recent crises, have underscored the un-sustainability of current paths to growth. He highlighted that the challenge for the UN system is to support countries more effectively in their efforts to implement the sustainable development agenda.

Mr. Thomas Stelzer noted that this panel provided a good opportunity to explore the impacts of current multiple crises and the challenges that came with those crises on sustainable development. He emphasized that all of us have been striving to strike a balance among the three components of sustainable development, namely economic growth, social development and environment protection. He considered that the panel provided a good opportunity to rethink and recalibrate our efforts, so that all the competing goals could be reconciled. He explained that the panelists would have opportunity to explore short and long term impacts of the current challenges, what initiatives the UN system had launched, and how the programmes could be supported to respond more effectively.

In his presentation, among the wide range of issues that sustainable development encompasses, **Mr. Jarraud** highlighted the UN system coordination on natural disaster and climate change, for which the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) is more involved. He explained that over the last 25 years about 90 percent of natural disasters were closely related to climate variability and it is becoming more intense in recent years.

He emphasized that it is therefore important to integrate disaster prevention into sustainable development approach and that is what WMO does in cooperation with all of the UN system entities. To put this into the perspective of developing countries, although the absolute cost of the disasters may be smaller compared to developed countries, the cost as proportion of GDP is much higher for developing countries, and the economic costs of disaster have increased by factor of 50 in the past 50 years. He noted that although natural hazards cannot be avoided, it is possible through proper action, such as early warning, to prevent them to turn into disasters. On climate change, he explained that United Nations has a long history of coordination. The first World Climate Conference was held in 1979, when UNEP and WMO established IPCC. The second World Climate Conference took place in 1990, which led to Rio and then to the establishment of UNFCCC. IPCC produces the Assessments Reports, for which nearly all UN programmes and agencies contribute. The UN has made enormous progress in Delivering as One on climate change, for which CEB is taking the lead under the leadership of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon. In particular, HLCP coordinates various entities on climate change. He explained that a strong message was delivered at the UNFCCC COP14 in December 2008 and there is a commitment to maintain the momentum to the COP15 and beyond. The UN system's coordinated response to climate change has five focus areas: Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD); technology transfer; finance; capacity building; and adaptation. The four cross-cutting areas are: science, assessment, monitoring and early warning; support for global regional and national action; public awareness; and climate neutral UN. The lead organization for each area of work has been identified, but all work is coordinated. He explained that WMO places particular emphasis on observation system, which is essential for diagnostics and decision making. In addition, he noted that the UN system also closely coordinate on the issue of water and the UN-Water, which can also be considered as a sum-mechanism of CEB, coordinating 26 UN entities, is a successful example of coordination.

Ms. Soder explained that she was wearing two hats, one of FAO and the other of the UN system as a vice-chair of the UNDG. Representing FAO, on the issue of hunger, she pointed out that more than 1 billion people were estimated to be undernourished by the end of the year, due to lack of food and access to food. She further pointed out that there were challenges on water, land and climate change. In the climate challenge, agriculture is considered as a big contributor to the GHG and the adaptation is more important in rural areas, in particular for small holders. In addition, there is a politically controversial biofuel issue. Population is estimate to rise to more than 9 billion in 2050. This will require far more efficient production system. She explained that how to combine the pressure on natural resource base with sustainable production is the most important challenge to agricultural field. There was, therefore, a need to accelerate the transition to sustainability and try to find the way to deal with all the crises that we were facing today. She noted the important decision that G8 adopted, which would secure additional \$20 billion over the next three years to food security and agriculture. She considered that this paradigm shift could not have occurred if it were not for the strong UN system coordination. The UN system strengthened its coordination through High-Level Task Force on Food Security and there is increased collaboration among the most

concerned agencies dealing with food and agriculture, namely IFAD, WFP and FAO. She noted that the declaration adopted at the High-Level Conference on the World Food Security: the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy, organized by FAO, together with IFAD and WFP, in 2008, highlighted the need to deal with policies in all areas and to work closely together in order to be able to deal with these challenges. FAO, together with IFAD and WFP, will hold a summit meeting on food security in November 2009, which will serve as a forum to discuss sustainable agriculture production and food security, including how to deal with bioenergy. At country level, FAO is preparing programmes on how to mitigate and adapt to climate change and how to introduce ecosystem friendly production methods. But she emphasized that FAO always works together with others UN entities on these issues and the work aims at supporting capacity-building, policy knowledge and institution building in the countries themselves. For example, the UN-Water, which FAO currently chairs, organized a conference in Africa, at which national development plans in the water sector and investment plans on water were highlighted and adopted for all African countries concerned. UN-REDD is another example, where UNEP, UNDP and FAO work together to support country dealing with deforestation and forest degradation. In terms of UN system coordination, she underlined the importance of the climate change initiative. She pointed out that the coordination has become very effective and it is addressing the needs at the country level in an efficient manner. She explained that UNDG is supportive of national ownership and places developing countries in driver seats. UNDG is also ready to take on the challenge of how to deal with mitigation and adaptation funds. She acknowledged that Copenhagen conference will be important, but the UN, as a collective, and the individual organizations have prepared well to be able to support member countries in their mitigation and adaptation initiatives. She explained that the system now knows that the focus needs to be on synergies and on avoiding overlaps and duplications, and on partnerships that can make a difference. The system, as well as the Member States, learned that it would not be necessary to create a new institution to solve a new problem. She concluded that one can always improve existing institutions.

Mr. Bouvier noted that this debate was taking place at the right time since there was a ministerial debate on global environmental governance in Belgrade a few weeks ago and on 30 June there was a meeting of Global Environmental Governance Project in Switzerland. The meeting in Belgrade was held at the request of the Member States, which decided at the UNEP Governing Council in February this year to set up a High-Level Group to look into new international governance and framework and architecture, following up the General Assembly debate in 2008. At the meeting of the Global Environmental Governance Project, all the former Executive Directors of UNEP assembled for the first time. The conclusion of the meeting highlighted the need for bold and radical changes in the thinking of environment and sustainability. He considered that this also had implication to the UN system coordination and there was a need to think about the basic tenet of the concept of sustainability. He explained that there was a need to further enhance the integration of environmental governance to strengthen sustainability. He considered that environment or sustainability was not a sector, but rather a foundation, on which pillars of economic and social governance could lead to sustainability. He explained that this concept had implication to the way the UN system

organizes itself. In terms of the UN system coordination, he thanked WMO and FAO for mentioning key important ones. In the current crisis context, he noted the importance of initiatives, such as global green new deal, which is a multi-agency initiative. The initiative tries to help promote solutions using current or forthcoming financial instruments. He underscored that crisis presented an opportunity for investment in energy efficient technologies, renewable energy, public transport, sustainable agriculture, environmentally friendly tourism, sustainable management of natural resources, using ecosystem as natural asset rather than economic burden. He considered that the transition to low-carbon and resource-efficient global economy was already underway. He pointed out, however, that how fast and how far these transitions could go would depend on political will. The decision at G8 might be encouraging, but as the Secretary-General noted it might not be sufficient.

In the pursuing discussion, comments were made that such coordination seems to be happening only at the high-levels of the UN system organizations and not transferred down to the ground level. Questions were also made whether such knowledge could be transferred to the use of developing countries, in particular in the climate negotiations. In response, as an example of coordination on the ground, a project for reducing the impacts of drought by WMO, FAO, IFAD, the World Bank and others in Ethiopia was mentioned. It was explained that the project was being expanded to other countries in Africa. In addition, the coordination during and after the Tsunami episode was mentioned as a good example of coordination on ground. As an example of transferring knowledge, sharing the knowledge of IPCC was mentioned. In addition, the eight pilot projects of "Delivering as One" and other examples of projects coordinated on the ground were also mentioned as good examples.