

**Informal summary of the thematic panel on  
“The current economic, food and climate change crises and their effects on the  
achievement of the MDGs: the role of UN system’s support to national efforts”  
ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment  
10:30 am – 1:00 pm, 15 July 2009  
Geneva**

**Chairperson and Moderator:**

H.E. Mrs. Carmen Maria Gallardo Hernández, Vice-President of ECOSOC

**Panel Members:**

- Mr. Luis Reyes, Senior Economist, Dominican Republic
- Ms. Noeleen Heyzer, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCAP
- Mr. Staffan De Mistura, Deputy Executive Director, WFP
- Mr. George Dragnich, Executive Director for Social Dialogue, ILO
- Ms. Jessica Faieta, UN Resident Coordinator in El Salvador
- Mr. Jim Butler, Deputy Director-General, FAO

**Issues and Discussion**

Following the opening of the Operational Activities Segment, the Council held a panel discussion on “the current economic, food and climate change crises and their effects on the achievement of the MDGs: the role of UN system’s support to national efforts”.

**Presentations of Panelists**

All panelists expressed grave concern about the combined effect of the economic crisis, the food crisis and climate change on development. At the global level, the dangerous mix of the economic slowdown and the high food prices is likely to push world hunger to a historic high in 2009. In the meantime, more than 50 million jobs could be lost worldwide by the end of 2009. A global jobs crisis of such a magnitude could linger for six to eight years, casting a shadow over the timely achievement of the MDGs.

Developing countries are most vulnerable to the consequences of the crises. For example, poverty rates have increased 10 per cent in El Salvador in the past two years, while the formal sector has lost around 30,000 jobs since September 2008. In Dominican Republic, the economic crisis has reversed the fast-paced progress towards poverty reduction and job creation. The ability of the government in dealing with these challenges has been seriously constrained by the shrinking fiscal space as a result of the economic crisis. Meanwhile, according to WFP, the transmission of

global events to vulnerability at the household level is becoming increasingly evident. Several speakers highlighted the critical importance of addressing the vulnerabilities of developing countries.

There was wide recognition that joint UN response on the basis of the comparative advantage of each UN entity is key to success in addressing the development challenges caused by the multiple crises. Panelists shared experiences in this regard. For example, Mr. Butler, Deputy Director-General of FAO mentioned that FAO together with WFP and IFAD has successfully implemented a joint programme in Mozambique to increase the incomes of smallholders in rural areas. The relatively small number of participating agencies has allowed the agencies to genuinely plan, work and report together, with each bringing their unique comparative advantage to support the project. Mr. George Dragnich, ILO Executive Director for Social Dialogue informed that ILO is pursuing close cooperation with FAO, WFP, UNEP and UN-Habitat to mainstream its Decent Work for All agenda in various areas of UN normative and operational activities. Mr. Staffan De Mistura, Deputy Executive Director of WFP noted that WFP is committed to undertaking concrete actions to improve global food security within the Comprehensive Framework for Action. The most important lesson learned from these experiences was that the UN system needs to work with Member States and with each other to design joint programmes that can more quickly achieve critical impact on people's lives.

The joint UN response at the global level also reinforced the collaboration of UN organizations at the country level. Ms. Jessica Faieta, UN Resident Coordinator in El Salvador informed that the UN Country Team in El Salvador provided policy analyses and recommendations for the country's MDG achievement through its joint project. Under the coordination of the Resident Coordinator, several UN agencies have successfully worked together to speed up progress in areas that lagged behind. Taking advantage of each UN agency's comparative advantage, strong UN staff technical capacity, UN's ability to engage and convene wide participation as well as UN's global capacity and expertise were among the key factors underpinning the success of the joint endeavour. UN system's work in Dominican Republic pointed to additional factors leading to success, notably, strengthening UN's leadership in resource mobilization and institutional development for developing countries, while reinforcing the coordination between national agencies and UN organizations.

Regional cooperation is an important avenue for accelerating progress towards the MDGs. Ms. Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Secretary of ESCAP briefed the Council on UN response to the multiple crises in the Asia and Pacific region. The success of ESCAP demonstrated the unique role that the UN system can play in supporting regional development agenda. For example, ESCAP served as a platform for consensus building towards trade facilitation within the region to counteract the stagnation of global trade caused by the economic crisis. ESCAP's comprehensive analytical work and policy options have laid a basis for significant agreements and

concrete actions in a vast array of regional issues that are critical to the fulfillment of MDGs. Active collaboration with UN agencies and various regional mechanisms is the hallmark of ESCAP's work. As Chair of UN Regional Coordination Mechanism, ESCAP made continuous efforts to ensure policy coherence of UN entities in the region, while helping UN organizations to deliver more coherently and working more effectively with other regional organizations, for example, the ASEAN.

### **Interactive Discussion**

An interactive discussion took place following the statements of panelists. During the discussion, Member States welcomed the joint efforts of the UN in response to the economic crisis, and requested further information on the joint initiatives, notably the 9 CEB joint initiatives and joint World Bank-UN response to the crisis. Some delegations noted that the economic crisis may provide an opportunity for the UN system to move faster towards system-wide coherence and "Delivering as One" at country level.

Mindful of the reduction in development financing, programme countries called for a renewed commitment to achieve ODA targets made in Monterrey, Gleneagles, Doha and the G20 summit in London. Furthermore, donor countries were called on to refrain from cutting their ODA budgets at a time of growing demand for financing for development. In this regard, some donor countries informed that ODA reached its historic high in 2008 and the G20 summit had pledged \$20 billion to support food and agricultural assistance to the poorest countries in an attempt to improve the food security model. Donor countries also assured that they will continue to fulfill their commitments, while stressing that the UN system should make efforts to present their results jointly with a view to facilitating donors' evaluation of UN's performance as a basis of resource allocation.

South-South cooperation, as an effective means of alleviating poverty and increasing sustainable development was also highlighted during the discussion. The UN development system was encouraged to play a more important role in helping developing countries share relevant experiences, information and lessons from development initiatives. The success of Cuba's support of Venezuelan literacy program was noted in this regard. However, South-South cooperation should provide solutions to exclusion and poverty alongside the support of developed countries.

On top of the general discussion, several specific questions were addressed to panelists. There were questions regarding the coordination between regional commission and UN regional directors team (RDTs) as well as the role of civil society organizations in the work of the UN in the Asia and Pacific region. There was also broad interest in understanding the role of Non-Resident Agencies (NRAs) in addressing global crises, particularly the food crisis.

In response, Ms. Heyzer noted that the current crisis highlighted the need to address three issues of priority towards the MDGs, notably, reversing the decline of trade, facilitating quick recovery, and putting in place systemic reform of international financial architecture. With regard to coordination with RDTs, Ms. Heyzer informed that ESCAP, in accordance with ECOSOC mandate, draws on the capacity and expertise of the entire UN system at the regional level, including that of the RDTs to respond to the request of programme countries. In this connection, focus has been placed on some transnational issues which ESCAP brings to the attention of UN Country Teams (UNCT) in the development of UNDAFs.

Panelists also stressed that “Delivering as One” should be utilized more effectively, notably through strengthening the analytical capacity of UNCTs and bringing the expertise of NRAs to the ground. In this regard, joint presentation of results achieved by the UN system will be an important step towards coherence. Furthermore, in the context of the economic crisis, renewed attention should be placed on the need of middle income countries (MICs), which are especially vulnerable to extreme poverty.