

**Introductory remarks by Mr. José Antonio Ocampo,
Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs**

**ECOSOC Panel on “Introducing operational reforms in the UN development system
in pursuit of the internationally agreed development goals, including those
of the Millennium Declaration”**

New York, 8 July 2005

H.E. Ambassador Jaime Moncayo,
Distinguished panel members,
Honourable Council members, delegates of Member States,
Distinguished colleagues from UN funds, programmes, and agencies,
Ladies and gentlemen:

Today we gather to discuss operational reform in the UN system to help meet internationally agreed development goals. I suggest that we begin with a basic, but central question: What really is the UN system’s role in country-level development operations?

We should approach this question in the broad context cast by the Secretary-General in his *In Larger Freedom* report. A major part of that context takes the form of the UN Development Agenda, generated from the global conferences and summits, including the MDGs. We also need to bear in mind the follow-up to the High-level Forum on Harmonization, particularly to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness agreed at its latest meeting.

Within this context, UN development operations serve as the vehicle for moving mandates from Member States into ground-level UN action against pressing problems, wrought by poverty, economic imbalances, environmental degradation, and weak governance.

These country-level contributions of the UN do not include major injection of financial resources. Other development partners are better equipped to play that role.

Of the many actors on the ground, the UN system has a unique capacity to provide multilateral, neutral, and flexible support to developing countries. That system-wide capacity derives from a rare combination of several factors:

- An unparalleled convening power, which allows the UN system to engage with the range of interlocutors at the country level, however diverse;
- A distinctive normative and advocacy role, to promote development in areas where global consensus has been reached;

- An analytical capacity on complex economic and social issues, undertaken with a keen awareness of the conditions and needs of the poorest and most marginalized groups;
- The particular role of the UN in conflict prevention and resolution, and thus its ability to link economic and social issues with peacebuilding in countries that are undergoing or have undergone conflict; and
- A unique technical capacity, to assist developing countries in strengthening their own, national capacities, in areas where the UN has acquired deep expertise and specific mandates.

At the beginning of the 1990s, funding of development cooperation suffered a marked decline. This became one of the main forces driving UN operational reform, aimed particularly to improve the system's efficiency and effectiveness. The system placed strengthening the coherence of its activities as an overriding objective. Synergies among agencies—working towards common development goals—needed to be intensified. Transaction costs had to be reduced. And processes to plan and implement UN operations needed to be simplified and harmonized.

Yet enacting and sustaining these reforms required an adequate level of financial resources. I am thinking, especially, of the “core” or “regular” resources, with which the UN system organizations build and maintain their basic capacities.

The same is true today, as we are pushing forward another phase of comprehensive and far-reaching reforms, begun in 1997. The aim is to increase effectiveness; to enhance coordination of, and coherence in, activities and processes; and to make better use of the UN system's human, technical, and financial resources. All to achieve better development results for Member States and their peoples.

Mr. Chairman,

The urgency of achieving the MDGs and other internationally agreed development goals requires the mobilization of all efforts. The news on increased commitments in ODA gives cause for some optimism. So do the preparations for the 2005 World Summit this September, which could give new momentum and direction to the array of reform efforts by the UN system, as well as by Member States and other actors.

Nonetheless, increasing UN effectiveness in development work at the country level will require the UN system to overcome a number of challenges. Let me mention a few, which I invite the panel to discuss:

- National ownership and leadership of country-level UN processes is crucial. We have to find ways to ensure that the mechanisms designed to enhance the coherence and effectiveness of UN development cooperation—such as the common country assessment (CCA) and the UN development assistance framework (UNDAF)—have *not* a UN, but a *national* focus, upholding that principle. This, in turn, would surely assist the essential

effort fully to integrate the UN system's operational activities into national plans and programming processes.

- The UN system needs to mobilize all of its parts that have capacities to support country efforts to achieve the development goals. How can the system mobilize its organizations that have useful experience or expertise, yet have no country presence or only a limited one? A related challenge is how to augment operational efforts with the work of UN organizations that have considerable analytical and normative experience in areas central to the pursuit of the MDGs and the other development goals.
- Non-UN system actors, including the private sector and civil society, can and should be more systematically engaged in UN operational activities. The modalities of public-private partnerships in providing UN development services need to be further explored. In financing development, for instance, we need to engage better the private sector, including in post-conflict situations.
- How to propel development after conflict is another challenge central to our discussion on operational reform. An effective response to long-term development concerns should reduce countries' vulnerability to crises. It could help to secure lasting peace, or to improve chances for stability, even if critical conditions still prevail. We need also to make operational activities for development a central focus of the proposed Peacebuilding Commission—and to build a strong working relationship between it and the UN system's development machinery.

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for the floor. I now invite our distinguished panelists to open the discussion.