



Statement by
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THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
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Mr. President,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The statements we have heard this morning suggest that we are on the cusp of a new, powerfully improved Economic and Social Council. With this overall picture in front of us, I wish to make only a few brief remarks, as a new Bureau takes the helm.

First, to Ambassador Munir Akram: Thank you for your outstanding and visionary leadership. Your Presidency has created new opportunities for the Council to fulfil its promise. And might I say, that working with you has strengthened—and often stretched—my own Department's capacities. Your energy and intensity has inspired us all.

I would also like to thank Ambassador Diego Cordovez of Ecuador and his predecessor, Ambassador Agim Nesho of Albania, and Ambassador Johan C. Verbeke of Belgium—all for their able leadership and service as members of the Bureau.

Next, to Ambassador Ali Hachani, our new Council president, and to the entire new Bureau, I offer my sincere congratulations. My colleagues and I in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs are very much looking forward to working with you.

Ambassador Hachani played a critical role in the success of the World Summit on the Information Society, especially of its Tunis phase. This makes him a major asset to ECOSOC in its new role in the follow-up to WSIS and, indeed, to the crucial role that ECOSOC plays in advancing the outcomes of all the major UN conferences and summits.

The 2005 World Summit made resoundingly clear that this, in today's terms, is the raison d'être for ECOSOC—to help drive implementation of the internationally agreed development goals. And this year, 2006, is when the rubber hits the road.

As we have heard from President Eliasson, the General Assembly is posed to conclude its deliberations on how to operationalize the Summit's decisions on development issues and on ECOSOC reform. Soon, it will be down to all of you in the ECOSOC membership to help ensure that the Council discharges its functions, old and new, to optimal effect.

I am convinced that, to do this, you must operate from a broad strategic perspective on how these functions reinforce and relate to one another—and, above all, to the mission to help member States and their peoples achieve their development goals.

With the decision to perform the annual ministerial level reviews, we now have a mechanism for a truly unified approach to tracking and evaluating progress towards the goals. These reviews could provide a meaningful picture of overall implementation, especially if enriched by national presentations and voluntary reviews. As such, the annual reviews would best be placed in advance of the global policy dialogue and Development Cooperation Forum, to be held in alternate years.

Through both the policy dialogue and the Forum, ECOSOC can strengthen its engagement with the actors within and beyond the UN system—and provide an indispensable instrument for achieving a high-level, collective focus on key development issues. The Forum itself could break new ground in promoting coherence in global development cooperation by engaging the range of actors dealing with North-South, South-South and bilateral cooperation. And it could help translate what we've learned into improved policy, strategy, and practice at all levels.

As it pursues this “evolutionary” approach, the Council has also been called to strengthen its capacities to anticipate and respond to emergencies that could impede or undermine progress towards the development goals.

Operating in either mode, evolutionary or emergency, the Council would need to tap its unique Charter-given potential for coordinating the development efforts of the UN system and for engaging its many non-governmental stakeholders and partners. This will be a huge challenge. And it is the context in which we look forward to the work of the panel launched by the Secretary-General to study system-wide coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment.

The World Summit decisions have provided broad new momentum for the work of the UN in development. With the new ECOSOC functions, it will now be possible for the intergovernmental process to deal in much greater depth with monitoring and evaluating progress and with realigning our efforts accordingly. The General Assembly will be able to build on this in its overall review of follow-up to the Millennium Declaration as a whole. And this can bring to development a weight in accordance with its special role as one of the three pillars of UN efforts—alongside and in mutual reinforcement with peace and security, and human rights.

In closing, let me assure you that this is the strategic perspective guiding our own work in DESA and within the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs. Indeed, in EC-ESA we have identified unified support to ECOSOC's functions as our number one priority in our joint efforts and in our collaboration with UNDG. We are eager to support the Council and the entire ECOSOC family of organizations in whatever way we can.