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Summary by the Vice-President  
The Panel discussion with the Chairpersons of the functional commissions  
Geneva, 7 July 2006

Chair: **H.E. Mr. Hjálmar W. Hannesson**, Vice-President of ECOSOC and the Permanent Representative of Iceland to the United Nations in New York

Panelists: **Mr. Patrizio Civili**, Assistant-Secretary-General for Inter-Agency Affairs and Policy Coordination; **H.E. Mr. Luis Alfonso De Alba**, Permanent Representative of Mexico, on behalf of the Chairman of the Statistical Commission; **Mr. Thomas Gass**, Vice-Chairman of the Commission on Population and Development; **H.E. Mr. Mehdi Danesh-Yazdi**, Chairman of the Commission for Social Development; **H.E. Ms. Carmen Gallardo Hernandez**, Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women; **Mr. Gabirele de Ceglie**, Chairman of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice; **H.E. Mr. Masood Khan**, Permanent Representative of Pakistan, on behalf of the Chairman of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development; **Mr. Hans Hoogeveen**, Chairman of the Bureau of the United Nations Forum on Forests; **Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz**, Chairperson of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

I. Introduction

For the past five years, the Council has held a meeting with the Chairpersons of the functional commission and these meetings have allowed the Council to engage in a free-flowing dialogue with the functional commissions to assess the work of the subsidiary bodies in contributing to the implementation of the UN development agenda as well as their contribution to a more integrated and coordinated approach to the follow-up of the major UN conferences and summits. This year's dialogue focused on the contributions that the functional commissions can provide to the new functions of the Council, which were mandated by the 2005 World Summit, in particular, the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) and the biennial Development Cooperation Forum (DCF).

The dialogue was chaired by the Vice-President of the Council, H.E. Mr. Hjálmar Hannesson. His opening remarks highlighted the broader context of UN reform in which the dialogue was taking place, in particular the new functions of ECOSOC. He emphasized that the dialogue presented an excellent opportunity to exchange views and create a policy-oriented assessment from the vantages of the commissions and to consider how the commissions could contribute to the new functions of the Council. With regard to the AMR, he suggested that the commissions could devote part of their annual sessions to AMR when the thematic focus of AMR relates to a substantive focus of the commissions' work. With regard to DCF, he suggested that the functional commissions could consider how best to support it and make contributions on development cooperation in the respective substantive areas of work.

Mr. Patrizio Civili, Assistant-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, emphasized that the panel should focus on how the functional commission could contribute to the new functions mandated to the Council by the 2005 World Summit. He underscored that the new functions of ECOSOC provided an important opportunity to advance the integrated and coordinated follow-up of the major UN conferences and summits by providing specific and comprehensive content to the Council's role in coordination, policy review and policy dialogue to center around the implementation of the agreed development goals. These new functions would also give an innovative and powerful content to the Council's interaction with the Commissions.

In order to focus the discussions, he suggested that the dialogue should focus around four key questions: 1) How to enable the Council and its subsidiary bodies to operate as a unified system around the common framework of the agreed development goals, so as to drive and advance the effective, coherent implementation; 2) How to reposition the Functional Commissions, as well as the Regional Commissions and expert bodies to ensure that the new functions of the Council, particularly the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) and the Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) are effectively supported; 3) Whether the Commissions addressing the issue of the extent to which their substantive priorities need to be adjusted in light of the Summit Outcome; and 4) How to gear the individual follow-up processes towards unified implementation of the UN development agenda – not only in terms of reporting, but also analytically and with a view to maximizing policy relevance and impact.

## II. Dialogue with the Chairpersons of the functional commissions

In the dialogue session the chairpersons and representatives of the functional commissions focused their interventions on the four key issues suggested by Mr. Civili. In the following, the dialogue is summarized accordingly.

### **1. How to enable the Council and its subsidiary bodies to operate as a unified system around the common framework of the agreed development goals, so as to drive and advance the effective, coherent implementation.**

Many chairpersons of the functional commissions were in agreement that their processes, in particular where there were global conferences, provided a platform for synergy, coordinated implementation and forums for global exchange of views in their respective areas. As a means to communicate between ECOSOC and the functional commissions, the chairpersons considered that joint bureau meetings were useful while at the same time noting that their effectiveness could be enhanced. Similarly, given the interlinkages between many of the goals, efforts to enhance collaboration between the functional commissions were made, generally at the level of the bureau, by organizing joint bureau meetings between functional commissions. For example, the Commission on the Status of Women has sought such collaborations with the Statistical Commissions, the Commission on Population and Development, the Commission on Social Development and the Commission on Human Rights. Other forms of communication between the functional commissions, such as wider dissemination of the outcome, were

highlighted by one chairperson, while the importance of briefing each other on the relevant items on their agenda was pointed out by another.

Technical commissions, such as the Statistical Commission and the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, emphasized their roles in international norm setting and providing technical guidance in their areas of expertise. The importance in improving synergy and coordination in technical cooperation was highlighted for the efficient allocation of funds. It was noted that synergies between the United Nations funds and programmes that are providing technical assistance on similar areas should start at the assessment and planning phase so as to result in better utilization of resources.

**2. How to re-position the Functional Commissions, as well as the Regional Commissions and expert bodies to ensure that the new functions of the Council, particularly the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) and the Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) are effectively supported.**

The chairpersons of the functional commissions were all supportive of the new functions of the Council and saw great value in supporting the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) and the Development Cooperation Forum (DCF). Many thought that their respective review processes could contribute to both AMR and DCF. However, in order to effectively contribute to the AMR and DCF, many chairpersons noted that the themes needed to be agreed upon well in advance. It was suggested for ECOSOC to have a multi-year work programme or an indicative list of common themes. With regard to the theme, some suggested that the Council should put forth themes in areas of common interests for various commissions.

Some commissions provided more specific suggestions. The Commission on the Status of Women stated that they could consider ways to enhance the transmission of the outcome of the high-level roundtables as inputs to AMR and DCF. The United Nations Forum on Forest considered that its biennial global meetings could contribute assessments of cooperation to DCF if it is held during the same year, while its planned biennial Ministerial sessions could transmit messages on the implementation of various aspects of the mandate of the Forum to AMR.

**3. Whether the Commissions addressing the issue of the extent to which their substantive priorities need to be adjusted in light of the Summit Outcome.**

Many chairpersons responded that their commissions have a standing agenda item, "Follow-up to ECOSOC decision". Many of them further stated that their respective commissions have incorporated the World Summit Outcome into their new work programmes and that consideration was also given, as far as possible, to major planned UN events. The United Nations Forum on Forest expected that when the Forum meets next year, a dynamic multi-year programme of work will be adopted, with emphasis on cooperation and policy and programme coordination. Some commissions, on the other

hand, stated that the World Summit Outcome reflected their work and that they did not need to adjust their work. The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues pointed out that their MDG-related work focused on the linkage between human rights and economic and social development and empowerment of indigenous people. The Permanent Forum also prioritized its advocacy around the commitments of the World Summit Outcome.

**4. How to gear the individual follow-up processes towards unified implementation of the UN development agenda – not only in terms of reporting, but also analytically and with a view to maximizing policy relevance and impact.**

Each commission emphasized the unifying role that it plays in its respective area that was provided by the respective conference outcome. For example, the Commission on Social Development pointed out the unique role it has in harmonizing the implementation of the social development goals in implementing the outcome of Copenhagen. Similarly, the Commission on Population and Development pointed out that population is a subject that cuts across all areas of socio-economic development. The Commission on Population and Development also emphasized the contribution it makes in refining and enhancing the global development agenda, for example, by providing consensus language on reproductive health. The United Nations Forum on Forest reported that one of the new functions added to the mandate of the Forum is to enhance the contribution of forests to the achievement of internationally agreed goals. The Forum expressed its willingness to work closely with other functional commissions in order to enhance the understanding of the mutually inter-related concerns.

It was also suggested that the Council could consider how to utilize the outcomes of the functional commissions more effectively. The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, however, considered that the current reporting arrangement provides a basis for the work of the Council.

### III. Open dialogue

Following the dialogue session of the chairpersons and representatives of the functional commissions, the floor was opened for comments and questions. Delegations supported the importance of greater synergy between the functional commissions and one delegation specifically called for the commissions to review the way they work in order to ensure that there are no overlaps in future work. The importance of creating better synergies between the functional commissions and the technical and operational arm of the UN in a related field was also highlighted. In this regard, it was noted that the Commission on Science and Technology had gone beyond creating synergy and had established an organic link with UNCTAD, which serves as its technical secretariat, and that this could serve as a model on how to fuse future coordination efforts. It was also emphasized that ECOSOC has the mandate to ensure the integrated and coordinated follow-up of the major United Nations conferences and summits and as such should bring together the different conference and summit review processes. It was further pointed out

that the new mandates given to ECOSOC by the 2005 World Summit, in particular, AMR and DCF could facilitate the Council's work in this regard. The delegations expressed their wish that the functional commissions would provide information and relevant material to AMR and DCF.

Furthermore, one delegation stressed that the work of the commissions should be results-oriented. Along the same lines, another delegation asserted that the commissions do not seem to have captured a methodology for relating their work to relevant goals emanating from the major UN conferences, which must be addressed. Many delegations, however, welcomed the review of the methods of work carried out by the functional commissions.

Delegations also posed commission-specific questions and comments. Many delegations commented on the role of the Statistical Commission in the provision of reliable statistics. Delegations suggested that the attention to the collection of local-level data seems to be lacking and that there is a need to develop capacity at grassroots level. One delegation, noting the importance of statistics in many aspects of the work of the United Nations and the alarming results in attaining the MDGs, stressed the need to work seriously on improving the collection and quality of data. The same delegation suggested that more should be done to support countries in this regards. In response, the Statistical Commission's representative stated that a resolution has been tabled for adoption by the Council, which asks for the strengthening statistical capacity of countries, and expressed his hope for its adoption.

Other specific issues raised by delegation included the following. With the Commission on the Status of Women, its handling of the issue of the rights of families in conflict situation was asked. In response, the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women agreed that the Commission's further attention is needed, and explained that the Commission is in constant contact with the Security Council on this issue. With the Commission on Population and Development, the difficulty in the work on population censuses was pointed out and the need for greater collaboration between the Commission and the Statistical Commission was stressed. In response, the representative of the Commission on Population and Development asserted that it is difficult to obtain money and human resources for carrying out the censuses as well as analyzing and disseminating the results. With the Commission on Social Development, the need to ensure proper coordination with ILO and other agencies on issues that are covered by multiple entities was stressed. With the Commission on Crime Prevention, it was strongly urged that the linkages between peace, security and development should be pursued as well as the need to address the linkage with human rights. Regarding the work of the Forum on Indigenous Issues, it was stressed that in the consideration of indigenous issues, human rights need to be perpetually a central focus. Noting that forests are often hiding places for criminals and are bombarded and destroyed by particular groups, a question was asked how the United Nations Forum on Forest intends to work on the protection of forest in time of conflict. In response, the representative of UNFF explained that the Forum is not directly involved in issues regarding conflict and security but in the future it intends to create a better enabling environment for reforestation.

#### IV. Conclusion

In closing, Mr. Civili stated that the broad based consensus that has emerged from the World Summit that MDGs and IADG should be pursued together has strengthened ECOSOC in its coordination function by providing a common framework for cooperation. He said that this also transpired in the discussions which had centered around the issue on how the functional commission can contribute to the achievement of the broader UN development agenda through their individual follow-up processes. He noted that coordination in a vacuum had its limitation and that coordination against targets had many more chances to have an impact and success. He also highlighted that the new functions of ECOSOC could help to bring together the respective expertise of the functional commissions and ensure that each of the functional commissions would contribute to the development agenda as a whole.

In his closing remarks, H.E. Mr. Hannesson also emphasized that the Dialogue with the Panel brought together good ideas regarding the potential contributions of the functional commissions to the new functions of ECOSOC, including strengthening synergies between the different follow-up processes, applying lessons learnt, coordinating thematic approaches, increasing effectiveness and aiming to be result-oriented and to avoid duplication and overlap.