

18 July 2006

**Summary of the
Informal dialogue between ECOSOC and
the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on
United Nations System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Development,
Humanitarian Assistance and Environment
(4 July 2006)**

During the 2006 high-level segment, the Economic and Social Council held an informal dialogue with the UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and Environment. The dialogue was chaired by the President of the Economic and Social Council, H.E. Ambassador Ali Hachani.

Three Co-Chairs of the Panel, H.E. Mr. Shaukat Aziz, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, H.E. Ms. Luisa Dias Diogo, the Prime Minister of Mozambique and H.E. Mr. Jens Stoltenberg, the Prime Minister of Norway, as well as H.E. Mr. Ricardo Lagos Escobar, former President of the Republic of Chile, Mr. Jean-Michel Severino, Director-General of the French Development Agency, and Ms. Josette Shiner, Under-Secretary for Economic, Business and Agricultural Affairs of the United States Department of State participated in the dialogue. Mr. Mark Malloch Brown, UN Deputy Secretary-General, was also present.

In his introductory remarks, **Ambassador Hachani** stated that the need for strengthening the United Nations by improving efficiency and coherence of its work has never been more imperative and the Panel had an important role in this regard. He observed that factors such as the fragmented institutional structures, diverse and at times duplicative governing arrangements and unpredictable resource flows to the majority of the UN system development organizations, were seen as the major constraints to improving delivery by the UN system. These factor, particularly institutional and structural inconsistencies in the governance of the UN development system, should be addressed by the Panel. While emphasizing that the United Nations Charter established ECOSOC as a central organ for coordination of the UN system activities, he expressed his hope that the panel members would take this into account in developing their recommendations on system-wide coherence.

Prime Minister Aziz, co-chair from Pakistan, while briefing the Council about the work of the Panel so far stated that it was primarily focused on system-wide coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment. The Panel members believed that the role of the United Nations was central in streamlining, improving and coordinating work not only within the UN system but also between the UN and the Bretton Woods institutions and the bilateral donors. This was particularly so in the area of development. On humanitarian assistance, he stated that the core issue was that such assistance should reach the needy in a timely fashion. In this regard, the Panel welcomed the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), established by the Secretary-General, as a concrete step to disburse funds more quickly and more

evenly when such needs arise due to natural or manmade disasters. On environment, he said there has been a proliferation of activities and there was a need to streamline the UN bodies' work in this area. He conveyed that the Panel was also looking at the issues of human resource policies as well as better use of resources and funding. With regard to the role of ECOSOC, he noted that the Council was well on its way to act as a more empowered institution. At the end of his briefing, he invited the members of the Council to share their views and thinking on these issues, particularly how the Council could become an instrument of improving UN's delivery in development, humanitarian assistance and environment.

He informed the Council that the Panel was going to formulate its recommendations over the next weeks so as to report to the Secretary-General in September.

Prime Minister Diogo, co-chair from Mozambique, underscored the importance of looking into the issue of fragmentation throughout the UN system. She illustrated this fragmentation by highlighting the need for better coherence in the area of gender mainstreaming. **Prime Minister Stoltenberg**, co-chair from Norway, stated that the Panel believed in a strong, more coherent and efficient United Nations. He stressed that the changes that the Panel would suggest were not designed to save money, but were meant to mobilize more money to increase needed activities. He stated that the Panel would focus on changes that were deemed necessary for adapting the UN to a changing world and to emerging demands of our times.

Mr. Lagos observed that in order to strengthen coordination and coherence there may be a need to both merge certain bodies and create new ones. Such options should be considered. While commenting on the need for strengthening the role of ECOSOC, he stressed that the original spirit of the UN Charter should be followed strictly and hence the specialized agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions should report to the Council. **Mr. Severino** stated that one of the functions of ECOSOC was to serve as a body for dialogue between the UN bodies and the Bretton Woods institutions. But this had not happened as yet. Moreover, the Panel had worked little on this aspect so far, apart from recent consultations with the Bretton Woods institutions in Washington, D.C. **Ms. Shiner** stressed that what the Panel was working towards an effective UN, which would have everyone's confidence.

During exchange of views with the Council members, all the delegations expressed their support for the work of the Panel and stated that they were looking forward towards the final report and recommendations. The following specific points were also raised:

- The Panel should pursue reform through a gradual approach and it should be in sync with the existing realities. It was stated that that the General Assembly resolution 59/250 on the Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review constituted an intergovernmental consensus on a policy framework and on how intergovernmental oversight and coordination in

the area of operational activities should be carried out and that the Panel should take this as a reference point.

- ECOSOC should be enabled to play the role envisaged for it by the United Nations Charter. There was a widely recognized need for improving the division of labour among the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions and other relevant actors.
- Concerns were expressed regarding suggestions or proposals to diminish the role of the UN regional commissions. The importance of the roles played by regional commissions for the countries of respective regions was underscored. Similarly, the importance of the work of UNCTAD for developing countries was emphasized. The Panel was requested not to consider any proposals to weaken UNCTAD. Instead, it should consider proposals to strengthen it further.
- The Panel was cautioned against entertaining any ideas of merging funds and programmes, as the mandates of funds and agencies were autonomous and that a merging of activities would reduce accountability. It was suggested that the Panel, however, could consider the possibility of promoting strong cooperation among programmes that were pursuing similar activities.
- The need for improving the work of resident coordinators, which was also referred to as the development face of the United Nations, was emphasized. The United Nations should strive towards the goal of unified presence at the country level. To this end, the participation of funds and programmes should be increased in the work of the resident coordinators.
- The Panel should consider steps to strengthen cohesion between the various environmental conventions. There was a need to ensure that environmental aspects were better integrated in the UN system. To this end, it was suggested that UNEP may be upgraded into a full-fledged UN specialized agency. However, a delegation opposed the idea of according UNEP the status of a specialized agency.
- The importance of maintaining a rights-based approach throughout the reform was emphasized, as the UN organizations had the responsibility to promote the implementation of rights defined in international conventions. In particular, it was emphasized that any reform outcome should include strengthening gender equality and improving access of women to all rights.

- A number of delegations emphasized that any improvement in efficiency should result in increased financial and organizational resources and that these increased resources in turn could be used for the benefit of the recipient countries.
- While appreciating the Panels efforts to reach out to countries, it was suggested that Panel should expand its reach and travel to as many regions as it could. It was also suggested that “fragile states” should also be given the opportunity to provide inputs to the work of the Panel.

While thanking the Panel members for the briefing, delegations expressed their interest in having a similar opportunity for a dialogue with the Panel after the submission of the report.