

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for my country and for me to serve as the President of the Economic and Social Council in 2004. I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to the members of the Council for giving me this opportunity.

Let me start by thanking Ambassador Gert Rosenthal for his leadership and contribution and commitment to the work of the Council this past year. I have been privileged to work closely with him during the past two years on the Bureau of ECOSOC, sharing his experience and vision of the United Nations. Streamlining the work of the Economic and Social Council was very much close to the heart of Ambassador Rosenthal. Together with you I wish to continue this important work.

A great deal has been achieved. The Ministerial Declaration of the Council's 2003 high-level segment put rural development back on the international agenda within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals. The Council had a productive session in its spring meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO, which made significant contribution to the follow-up of Monterrey and to the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development of the General Assembly. The Council's support of peace-building in Africa has been demonstrated by the Ad Hoc Advisory Groups on Guinea-Bissau and, more recently, on Burundi with the skillful help of the Ambassador of South Africa, H.E. Mr. Dumisani Shadrack Kumalo and other ECOSOC members.

These results – and I only named a few – could not have been achieved without the dedicated work of the President and the fellow bureau members, H.E. Ambassador Valery Kuchinsky of Ukraine, H.E. Ambassador Murari Raj Sharma of Nepal and H.E. Ambassador Abdul Mejid Hussein of Ethiopia.

Let me briefly outline our work in 2004:

Delivering on new mandates from major UN conferences and summits

It will be crucial to further strengthen our efforts to enhance the way the United Nations works on conference follow-up in the economic and social sectors. We need to reinforce our efforts and, in particular, we need to seize the opportunities that recent United Nations conferences and summits have provided for the Council, as a central part of the UN, to fulfil the commitments assumed in the Millennium Declaration. The Monterrey Consensus, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and the Brussels Programme of Action have given new mandates to the Council and the Council has an important role to play in their follow-up. ECOSOC has done well in supporting and in coordinating and guiding the UN system. But we need to move to the next step. Our work needs to have an impact on the ground. We need to monitor progress towards the goals agreed by us at Brussels for LDCs and to keep all partners mobilized to attain these goals. We also need to adequately address sustainable development themes to energize implementation of the WSSD outcome.

The General Assembly, in resolution 57/270B, called specifically for strengthening the role of ECOSOC in promoting integrated and coordinated conference implementation. It requested the Council to establish a multi-year work programme for the coordination segment. The aim is to reach a decision before the substantive session of 2004 on the work programme, based on a focused and balanced list of cross-sectoral thematic issues common to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits, including the objectives, goals and targets of the Millennium Declaration. I count on your active participation in this important undertaking: A multi-year work programme will help us to better engage entities of the system in our work as our agenda will become more predictable.

Substantive Session

The theme of this year's high-level segment is resources mobilization and enabling environment for poverty eradication in the context of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001 – 2010. The high-level segment is again an opportunity to highlight the work of the UN system around the chosen theme and I invite all parts of the UN to actively take part: the ECOSOC provides the common forum. The ECOSOC is the link between policy and practice and a meeting place for all stakeholders.

The coordination segment will address two themes: first, mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system and, second, coordinated and integrated United Nations approach to promote rural development in developing countries, with due consideration to least developed countries. Sufficient time will be needed to enable the Council to devote adequate attention to the two themes.

Our operational activities segment will prepare the ground for the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development by the General Assembly. This is a crucial task of ECOSOC. We will also assess the way UNDAF works, which is an important issue for UN reform. Closely related to the operational activities segment is the humanitarian affairs segment, which will give guidance to strengthen the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations.

The general segment will be an important focus of my presidency and I will aim at making this segment as efficient and interesting as possible. We also need to give proper attention to the work of the functional commissions as well as the other subsidiary bodies during this segment - and not only during the segment but as part of the regular work of the Council throughout the year.

Spring Meeting

Building on the experience of the special high-level meeting of the Economic and Social Council last year with the Bretton Woods Institutions and the World Trade Organization we are consolidating the relations with these major institutional stakeholders. The preparations for the next spring meeting are well underway - again thanks to my predecessor, Ambassador Rosenthal. The active support and input of the relevant United Nations agencies are crucial to follow up the implementation of the

different components of the Monterrey Consensus. We may note that representatives of the Trade and Development Board of UNCTAD will be invited to the high-level meeting this year. We will also share best practices and exchange information with the private sector and civil society in the preparatory process. I hope that the meeting will add real value in addressing the issues of coherence, coordination and cooperation and maybe focusing on more specific issues within the holistic and integrated approach of the Monterrey Consensus.

Ad Hoc Working Groups on African Countries Emerging from Conflict

The Council will also continue to consider the situation of African post-conflict countries, through the work of its ad hoc advisory groups on Burundi and Guinea-Bissau. The Burundi Group will present a report with its recommendations to the Council at its forthcoming organizational session, during which a progress report on the work of the Guinea-Bissau Group will also be considered. The Council will undertake an assessment of lessons learned based on the initial experience of these two Groups at its substantive session in July. Through this increased involvement in post conflict assistance, ECOSOC strengthens its working relationships with the Security Council and with the operative agencies of the UN. It can contribute to foster the comprehensive approach to peace and development in which the whole UN system can be engaged. Indeed, we are all convinced that the challenges of conflict and development are closely intertwined. This must be translated into a different way of working in the countries and at international level. I trust that we can make additional steps in that direction this year.

Reform of ECOSOC

The ECOSOC has taken several decisions to review its own work and the new mandates oblige us to adjust the work programme. For instance, we should assess how to give a better focus to each segment of the substantive session. The Bureau will continue its endeavours to improve the preparations of the meetings as the Council has called for. There is a new momentum of reform in the United Nations. The President of the General Assembly is actively involved in revitalizing the work of the General Assembly. The Secretary-General has appointed a high-level panel to examine the new challenges including economic and social issues, and I encourage the ECOSOC collectively and its members individually to contribute to the outcome of this panel as well as to the other reform efforts.

I will do my best to listen to the voice of the ECOSOC members in carrying out my responsibilities in 2004. I trust that the Bureau will do its utmost to work in a transparent and responsive manner and that the Council will enhance its relevance in the tasks assigned to it by the Charter.