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**Statement by H.E. Ambassador Rasi, Permanent Representative of Finland to the
United Nations and President of Economic and Social Council**

Commemorating ten years of freedom in South-Africa

New York, 27 April 2004

Mr. Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with both honor and pleasure that I take the floor at this meeting
Commemorating ten years of freedom in South-Africa, in my capacity as President of the
Economic and Social Council.

The challenge facing South Africa with the achievement of democracy in 1994 has
been one of a kind in modern times. A decade later, South Africa remains a tremendous
sign of hope for Africa. The new democracy in South Africa has shown how a country
divided along ethnic lines and where the majority of the population was denied basic
rights could change towards a united, peaceful and prosperous society. It demonstrated
how such a transition could be achieved in a spirit of justice and reconciliation.

The key role in the peaceful transition to democracy was played by President Nelson
Mandela. Under his skilful leadership it was possible to unify the nation and to clear
severe collisions. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa was a
remarkable achievement that works as a model for other countries on the way to national
consiliation.

The South African experience is of great value and relevance for many countries in transition. We all know how fragile transition processes can be and how the risk of falling or relapsing into conflict is high in such contexts. At the international level, transition processes require appropriate support and ‘mentoring’ from all relevant actors. The United Nations system is very much solicited to provide support in such circumstances.

I am pleased to note that the experience of South Africa is now used at the international level to help countries going through similar processes. As many of you are aware, South Africa has played a leading role in the work of the ECOSOC Ad Hoc Advisory Groups on African countries emerging from conflict, a recent initiative by ECOSOC to help the transition process from relief to development and to promote stability. I wish to welcome and praise the extensive work carried out by my good friend Ambassador Dumisani Kumalo, Permanent Representative of South Africa, in chairing these Groups and leading their work to most interesting and productive outcomes.

The role of South Africa in promoting peace and development on the African continent and elsewhere is a welcome and important development that is of great added value for the international community. Within our intergovernmental machinery, the mobilization of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council must go together to avoid that the fragility of transition processes lead to

outbreaks of violence. I am convinced that we will continue to be inspired in these efforts by the South African experience.

Thank you for your attention.