

OPENING STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF ECOCOC

H. E. AMBASSADOR LÉO MÉRORÈS

AT THE ECOSOC ORGANIZATIONAL SESSION

14 JANUARY 2008

Excellencies,

Mr. Secretary-General,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to serve as the President of the Economic and Social Council for this year and would like to thank the members of the Council for reposing their confidence in me. With your support and engagement, I am confident that we can make this year another landmark year in the work of the Council. I see this as a year of both promise and challenge.

It is my pleasure to welcome among us the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon. Since taking up his office last year, he has extended strong and continued support to the work of the Council. We welcome his determination to strengthen the development pillar of the United Nations. This would certainly help to further advance the Organization's leadership in promoting the development agenda.

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

I would like to extend my congratulations and sincere thanks to Ambassador Dalius Čekuolis for having successfully led the Council through an important year of change in 2007. He capably steered the implementation of the new functions of the Council and introduced a number of innovations to improve its effectiveness. It will be an honour to build upon the foundations he has laid and to help bring to fruition some of the improvements to ECOSOC envisioned in the 2005 World Summit Outcome.

Last session's successes would not have been possible without the contribution of my colleagues on the Bureau -- Ambassador Youcef Yousfi of Algeria, Ambassador Hjálmar W. Hannesson of Iceland, and Ambassador Hilario G. Davide of the Philippines -- whom I would also like to thank.

And it is my pleasure to congratulate the new members of the Bureau on their election. The coming year will demand concerted effort to continue to strengthen this Charter body. I count on them for their strong support and able assistance.

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ambassador Čekuolis has eloquently outlined what the Council has achieved during a landmark year. Please permit me now to focus on the tasks ahead of us, for which I count on your active collaboration.

Selection of the theme of the 2008 Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) -- "implementing the agreed goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development" -- could not have been more timely. This subject is on top of agenda among policy-makers and citizens alike, the world over. It is an issue to which I attach particular significance, as a citizen of a small island developing state (SIDS). Collectively, we are responsible for emitting less than 1 per cent of global greenhouse gases, yet the SIDS and our largely coastal populations will suffer more, sooner, from the effects of climate change, sea level rise and extreme events. Our countries struggle with low adaptive capacity and high adaptation costs relative to GDP. If immediate action is not taken, human health and well-being will be severely impacted, within SIDS and around the rest of the globe.

I believe that ECOSOC has the potential to further our common understanding of how climate change and social and economic development are interlinked. In particular, the Council can provide a forum for the integration of the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development that is presently lacking at the global level. And it can bring the energy of its Functional Commissions to bear on the complex challenges humanity faces as a result of its actions. A productive and action-oriented 2008 AMR, with broad participation, will be an important first step to realizing this great potential.

Of course, the true test of our success is the extent to which the AMR contributes to achieving our development agenda. It is too early to judge its effect. But we should ensure that we learn from and build upon the successful experiences of 2007.

I would like to take a moment to express my appreciation to the eight countries that have volunteered to make national presentations during the upcoming AMR. Taking part in this exercise requires intense work at the national level. I pledge to work actively with these countries in order to ensure that their presentations yield the desired results. These presentations should be of value to you and to others who stand to learn from your policies and experiences. And I look forward to devising some creative ways to facilitate Council members' engagement in a productive and constructive discussion with the NVP countries.

Regional input is also important to the Council's review of progress in implementing the internationally agreed development goals. I encourage countries to come forward to lead consultations in their regions.

Distinguished delegates,

I will make every effort to ensure the success of the first-ever biennial Development Cooperation Forum (DCF). The DCF is expected to become a principal mechanism for global dialogue and policy review on key development cooperation issues.

The DCF preparatory process, and the Forum itself, are envisioned to contribute to the 2008 Doha Follow-up Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, in particular in the area of international financial and technical cooperation for development. And the DCF process can provide stepping stones towards a renewed global consensus on aid quality and architecture, including national ownership and leadership.

This coming weekend (19-20 January 2008), a high-level symposium will take place in Cairo, to explore how to promote results-oriented development cooperation in pursuing national priorities. An important aim of the Cairo Symposium is to further strengthen the voice of developing country actors in the global debate regarding the promotion of strong national ownership and leadership of development cooperation.

This unique Forum will not be able to meet the high expectations that have been placed upon it without the active participation of all relevant actors. We should join hands in mobilizing and facilitating participation of these actors. This should become a truly global forum on development cooperation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Central to the work of the Council is bringing the UN system together behind the intergovernmental legislation. In search of continuity, it is important that the coordination

segment now follows the AMR theme. This can turn *words* spoken by Ministers and heads of agencies into *action* by the UN family. It is a privilege to take ECOSOC in that direction. We must remember that follow-up remains a continuous process.

One of the chief goals for my presidency is to increase the engagement of all stakeholder in the work of the Council. I wish to mobilize their participation in the substantive session. There are two notable opportunities through which civil society can contribute to our work. First, the Civil Society Development Forum, held just before the ECOSOC Substantive Session, develops recommendations presented to governments during the session. Second, the Innovation Fair -- a showcase of replicable innovations towards attainment of the development goals -- is an important complement to the AMR. Last year, contributions by non-governmental organizations and UN system entities, as well as Member States and the private sector, provided inspiration on effective ways to combat poverty and hunger. I look forward to learning about successful and promising means to achieve sustainable development this July.

I attach great importance to the work that the ECOSOC has undertaken to assist my country, Haiti. The efforts of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti to provide advice on the country's long-term development strategy have had tangible impact. Many challenges remain, and the government and people of Haiti welcome the continued engagement of the Advisory Group. This special relationship between the Council and my country cause me to feel all the more privileged to lead this body.

I will devote significant energy to ensuring that ECOSOC plays its due role in the areas of peace and security, and emergencies. I urge all members to ensure that the Peace-building Commission (PBC) and the Council work together in unison. ECOSOC's ad Hoc Advisory Groups on Haiti, Burundi and Guinea-Bissau have taught us much about the virtues and challenges of an integrated approach to post-conflict peace-building. We should ensure that the PBC benefits from this experience and that it appropriately incorporates the economic and social dimensions in its work.

Moreover, I fully share the views expressed by my predecessor about how to improve the methods of work of the Council -- especially regarding the General Segment -- and I will work with all members to deliver on its full promise. The task of adapting the Council to its new functions is ever-evolving, impossible to accomplish during the tenure of a single President.

Indeed, we have a lot of work ahead of us, starting with this organizational session. The Bureau and secretariat have planned meetings and events that will require your engagement, as well as that of other stakeholders.

First, I feel this year's meeting with the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs), WTO and UNCTAD has the potential to contribute in a meaningful way to the review conference in Doha. I urge all to use this opportunity to convey their views to the institutional stakeholders. And, on 25 February, a special half-day event is being organized on how

philanthropy can contribute to advancing the Millennium Development Goals, in particular those relating to sustainable development. Moreover, we have a number of activities related to the DCF and AMR to look forward to, leading up to the July Substantive Session.

The international community has underscored the Council's important role within the UN system and has endowed it with new responsibilities. In the coming year, I count on each and every one of its members -- starting with myself and the Bureau -- to contribute to fulfilling the vision of a stronger, more effective ECOSOC and to ensuring that we move closer to meeting the internationally agreed development goals.

I am honored to lead the Council in pursuit of these goals. Thank you.