

18 September 2012

2012 Special Ministerial Meeting of the Economic and Social Council

Background note for the panel discussion

**24 September 2012, 3:30 pm – 7:45pm
United Nations Headquarters, New York**

Introduction

At the Rio Conference on Sustainable Development, the world leaders acknowledged¹the vital importance of an inclusive, transparent, strengthened and effective multilateral system to better address the urgent global challenges of sustainable development.

A strengthened multilateral system for promoting sustainable development should be able to promote a shared analysis of issues and challenges, and facilitate agreement on objectives and possible approaches to achieve them. It should effectively support and encourage the implementation of these policies and approaches, and review implementation. It should also be able to address the deficit of policy coherence. Above all, it should be able to integrate the economic, social and environmental pillars.

In *The Future We Want*, the world leaders recognized key role of the Economic and Social Council in achieving a balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

ECOSOC is not a stand-alone body. It is a system consisting of various subsidiary organs, regional commissions; specialized agencies; and functional commissions that are attended by sectoral ministers, experts, and civil society representatives.

As a 'system', its democratic structure and inclusiveness give the Council legitimacy for promoting international dialogue on global trends and policy making on issues ranging from population and development, statistics, gender issues, finance, narcotic drugs, crime prevention and criminal justice, science and technology and environment, among others. All of the aforementioned areas are directly or indirectly related to the three pillars of sustainable development.

The ECOSOC system is therefore well placed to play a key role in (a) reviewing the implementation of the global development agenda, including achievement of the MDGs by 2015; (b) integrating the economic, social and environmental pillars; and (c) contributing to the on-going work on a post 2015 development agenda.

¹ Para 77 of *The Future We Want* (A/Conf.216/L.1)



ECOSOC has been performing this role through its many current functions, including the Annual Ministerial Review and the Development Cooperation Forum. There is a need to further strengthen this role in addressing both emerging concerns and prevailing sustainable development challenges, which range from rising unemployment, food security, biodiversity, climate change, financing and technology transfer.

To address the broad array of challenges, the whole multilateral system needs to be reinvigorated. ECOSOC should be a central plank of this renewed system. To make it fit for the purpose, the ECOSOC system should consider major changes in its agenda setting and working methods. This was also recognized by the Council in a recently adopted resolution on the role of ECOSOC in the integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up to the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits.

Such changes would require political level engagement. A ministerial meeting is therefore being organized to discuss these issues.

Objectives of the Ministerial Meeting

The main objective of the Special Ministerial Meeting is to discuss steps that are needed for a strengthened and more effective multilateral system that governs the global economic, social and environmental spheres. Ministers representing Member States will discuss their respective views and recommend how to best undertake this strengthening.

As called for at the Rio Summit, a strengthened multilateral system should: 1) effectively respond to emerging global challenges; 2) forge agreements on integrated approaches to addressing global sustainable development challenges; and 3) review implementation of the commitments.

The Meeting is expected to address the following topics:

- *What specific measures are needed for promoting an inclusive, strengthened and effective multilateralism system that can address the urgent global challenges of sustainable development?*
- *How can ECOSOC fulfil its key role assigned by Rio+20 in achieving the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development?*
- *What steps should be taken for ECOSOC to respond more effectively to unfolding crises?*
- *How can the ECOSOC system strengthen its role as the common platform for policy coherence?*





Expected Outcome

The outcome of the meeting will be an official summary by the President of ECOSOC. The summary will be circulated to all Member States and taken up by the Council for further action.

Date and Venue

The ECOSOC Special Ministerial Meeting will be held on Monday, 24 September 2012, from 3:30 pm – 7:45 pm,² at United Nations Headquarters in New York. The Meeting is convened as a formal meeting of the Council, and will be attended by Member States at the Ministerial level. An annotated agenda and programme will be circulated closer to the meeting.

² The Meeting can be extended until 9:00 pm.

