

**SUMMARY OF THE
SPECIAL MINISTERIAL MEETING
OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
24 SEPTEMBER 2012, NEW YORK**

A Special Ministerial Meeting of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) was convened in New York on 24 September 2012. Over 100 Ministers and high-level officials participated in the meeting which focused on strengthening the multilateral system for pursuing sustainable development, especially through enhancing the role and effectiveness of ECOSOC. The meeting served as an early follow-up to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), which called for the Council to play the key role in the integration of the three pillars of sustainable development.

Key messages

- A major rethink for the multilateral system is in order, as is far greater policy coherence across the economic, social, and environmental pillars.
- The entire ECOSOC system needs to refocus its efforts on sustainable development, with agendas, working methods and engagement with other actors redesigned.
- ECOSOC needs to become a key hub for collective action on sustainable development. Instead of launching parallel structures for sustainable development, there is a need to instead renew and revitalize current institutions.
- ECOSOC should play a stronger role in leading the UN's efforts to form stronger partnerships with civil society, the private sector and academia to address emerging development challenges.
- Stronger political support is needed to redesign global institutions.

Summary

I. Opening Remarks

H.E. Mr. Miloš Koterec, President of ECOSOC welcomed all participants and speakers. He mentioned the importance of the Special Ministerial Meeting following the Rio+20 conference and the need for increased dialogue at the highest political levels on how to devise a relevant post-2015 development agenda. He argued that ECOSOC could serve as a natural hub for collective action on sustainable development given its strong partnerships within the UN



family and with other multilateral institutions, as well as its history of collaboration with international financial and trade institutions. He therefore urged participants to resist the temptation to create parallel structures, and instead focus on renewing and revitalizing current institutional arrangements. He noted also that national institutions alone cannot deal with the myriad development challenges, making the case for reorienting multilateral institutions toward greater effectiveness. He concluded by stating that the meeting was the first in a series of important steps for taking collective action on sustainable development. The recommendations that emerge will guide further consultations and actions on the strengthening of the Council, to be pursued by the GA, and by ECOSOC.

Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-moon stressed that a strengthened multilateral system must be able to address immediate concerns as well as longer-term sustainable development challenges. He presented five challenges on which ECOSOC could make important contributions – (i) the global jobs crisis and preventive action to avoid a new global recession; (ii) fulfilment of donor commitments to developing countries; (iii) food and nutrition security; (iv) follow-up to Rio+20, especially for inclusive green growth; and (v) revival of the Doha trade round. The Secretary-General also called for coherent processes for the formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and post-2015 development agenda to enable Member States to define a single global development framework.

H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić, President of the 67th session of the General Assembly (GA), presented the overarching theme for this session of the General Assembly as “bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means”. He also shared his expectation that the GA and the Council would remain committed to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) while looking ahead to the post-2015 agenda. In addition, he proposed that a framework for dialogue and effective collaboration between the GA, international financial institutions and informal associations such as the Group of 20 (G20), should be established in the next few years.

Mr. Wu Hongbo, Under-Secretary-General for UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), pointed out that the special meeting is taking place at a time when three important processes are also taking shape: (i) the follow-up to Rio+20; (ii) work on the post-2015 development agenda; and (iii) ongoing ECOSOC reform initiatives. He said that ECOSOC’s leadership on these processes would involve primarily reviewing implementation of the global development agenda, integrating the three pillars of sustainable development as requested in the Rio+20 outcome document and contributing to the ongoing discussions on the post-2015 development agenda. Noting that substantial changes are needed to the ECOSOC agenda setting and working methods, Mr. Wu also recognized that this will require significant political engagement.



II. Panel Discussion

Mr. David Steven, Senior Fellow, Center on International Cooperation (CIC), New York University, served as moderator. He opened the panel discussion by describing the current global development challenges, namely: (i) the jobs crisis and its impact on youth; (ii) the need to build on Rio+20 by shifting to a green growth trajectory; and (iii) setting post-2015 development goals. He noted that these challenges require substantial reforms to the multilateral system, calling for a systemic rethink that would improve coherence.

H.E. Mr. Gert Rosenthal, former President of ECOSOC, served as the first panelist. He noted the crucial role that multilateral institutions play in the current inter-dependent global economy and implored them to improve policy coordination and monitoring of implementation. He highlighted the potential usefulness of combining the strengths of the G20 with the strengths of ECOSOC into something like an “economic security council” within the UN.

In pursuing greater coherence and effectiveness, Mr. Rosenthal argued that an arrangement like the G20 is necessary; it is crucial for major players to have a forum where they can take collective decisions to stir the economy in the direction of stability, prosperity and inclusiveness. At the same time, the United Nations has a comparative advantage in certain key functions, particularly impacting public awareness and influencing the international development agenda. He outlined three key challenges that hinder ECOSOC’s success: (i) lack of high-level political participation; (ii) weak coordination of the Council’s subsidiary bodies; and (iii) the overlapping agendas of the GA and ECOSOC. These three issues must be addressed in any attempt to strengthen ECOSOC. He concluded by noting that the High Level Political Forum that was agreed in the outcome document of Rio+20 should fall under ECOSOC’s oversight and could potentially renew its convening power.

Mr. Timothy Wirth, President of the United Nations Foundation, was the second panelist. He traced certain historical accomplishments of ECOSOC, beginning in the 1960s and concluded that ECOSOC was functioning at its best when it focused on outcomes, not procedures. He discussed four emerging issues which require ECOSOC’s attention: (i) successful completion of the first phase of the MDGs and transition to the post-2015 framework, with the integration of sustainable development ; (ii) addressing the centrality of energy security in all aspects of the UN development agenda; (iii) leading the UN’s efforts to form stronger partnerships with the private sector and academia to address emerging development challenges (iv) mainstreaming gender in all UN activities and engaging the related constituencies. He concluded by emphasizing that in addressing the above issues, ECOSOC should take full advantage of its unique convening power.

H.E. Mr. Munir Akram, former ECOSOC President, was the third and final panelist. He argued that ECOSOC is stronger today than it was forty years ago. However, the need for greater policy coherence and effective implementation of the increasing numbers of decisions made by the international community had placed ever-expanding demands on it. Mr. Akram identified



three important areas for further change: (i) the restructuring of ECOSOC's agenda to those issues that have been prioritized by Member States, including the MDGs and decisions made at conferences such as Rio+20; (ii) the importance of rethinking the structure of the Council by creating a smaller group of 27 members ("the L-27") within ECOSOC composed of a combination of permanent and rotating members, to improve efficiency; and (iii) the need to expand on the expertise of the secretariat drawing on the entire UN system.

III. General remarks on the role of ECOSOC and its strengths and weaknesses

Slovakia, Egypt, Spain, Nepal, France, Germany, and Italy stressed the importance of ECOSOC's responsibility in coordination and system-wide coherence, and emphasized the need to fulfil its Charter mandate by serving as a principal body for policy review, policy dialogue and recommendations in times of economic, social and environmental crises.

Slovakia emphasized the importance of ECOSOC's convening power, stating that it had been effective in organizing special events and meetings in response to emerging development challenges. It specifically highlighted the successful event held in May 2012 on global youth unemployment, "Creating a Sustainable Future: Empowering Youth with Better Job Opportunities", as a model.

Indonesia highlighted ECOSOC's ability to bridge the normative, analytical and operational aspects of the UN's development work. **Finland** stressed the Council's unique role in integrating expertise with policy-making. **Bangladesh** drew attention to the usefulness of the Council's policy dialogues, whilst **Germany** stressed its importance as a platform for sharing best practices.

The **European Union** identified the Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) as a key value of ECOSOC on which other multilateral mechanisms should be modelled, and the **Republic of Korea, Slovakia** and **Ukraine** stressed the quality and usefulness of the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR). **Slovakia** suggested enhancing the AMR, as part of the ECOSOC toolkit, by improving its monitoring features. **Germany** pointed to the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) as a very effective instrument.

Nicaragua, Barbados and Italy drew attention to ECOSOC's inclusiveness as an advantage compared to other international bodies.

Slovakia recommended that ECOSOC should serve as a centre for shared analysis of risks for the UN development system, a particularly suitable role for the Council given its role in system-wide coherence and coordination. If it leveraged this role more effectively, it could more firmly establish itself as the centre for the discussion of cross-cutting development issues within the UN.

Mexico stated that the international community seemed to rely increasingly on "multilateralism *à la carte*" and suggested that ECOSOC needed to find its role within this new



reality. Specifically, it proposed that the Council needs to take a more profound sense of ownership over development issues.

Finland wondered if ECOSOC is truly capable of addressing unfolding challenges. **Norway and Finland** emphasized the importance of the willingness of Member States to commit to enabling effective changes within ECOSOC. **Mr. Rosenthal** and **Belgium** expressed the need to strengthen the ECOSOC Secretariat.

Guatemala drew attention to the convening power of ECOSOC, but noted that it was difficult to attract the attention of policy makers from the economic and finance sectors. It also highlighted problems regarding the division of labour between the Council and the General Assembly, as well as the difficulties of coordinating the subsidiary bodies. **Indonesia** proposed that the coordination between the Council and its subsidiary bodies requires greater attention. **Nicaragua** encouraged ECOSOC to respond more capably to emerging challenges.

IV. Reform of the institutional framework

Denmark and **Russia** emphasized the need to consider reforming ECOSOC without changing its mandate. **Finland, Russia, the United Kingdom** and **Belarus** urged against the creation of additional bodies. **Egypt** emphasized ECOSOC's important role as a deliberative – not decision-making – forum and opposed the idea of an economic security council.

The **Republic of Korea** and the **Bahamas** stated that GA Resolution 61/16 provides a good basis for reform of ECOSOC. **Sri Lanka** stated that ECOSOC reform must be conducted within the principles of Rio conference and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), while the **Bahamas** drew attention to integrating principles from the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy.

Switzerland highlighted the need for a dual-track approach to multilateral efforts on sustainable development, emphasizing the need to continue ECOSOC reform while putting in place the high-level political forum (HLPF) on sustainable development. The respective roles of these bodies would need to be clearly defined to avoid duplication and ensure complementarity. **Belgium** emphasized the need for the Council to work in synergy with the high-level political forum. **Brazil** proposed discussing ECOSOC reform and the coherence of the institutional framework in tandem with the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

Nepal and **Bangladesh** – with support from **Belgium** – called for greater inclusion of the interests of least developed countries (LDCs) within ECOSOC's framework (especially in preparing the SDGs, the QCPR, the discussions on financing for development and the drafting of the post-2015 development agenda).

Guatemala expressed the need for some arrangement similar to the more nimble G20 for a quicker and more effective response to unfolding crises.



V. Interaction and coordination with other stakeholders

Guatemala, Italy, the European Union, Pakistan, Nepal, Gabon, Mexico, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Barbados called for fostering the interaction of ECOSOC with different stakeholders. Many Member States emphasized the need to coordinate the work of ECOSOC with the activities of the General Assembly and to establish a clearer distribution of work in their respective mandates.

The **United States, the Bahamas, and Nepal** drew special attention to the Council's interaction with the wider UN system, while **Nicaragua, Denmark, Croatia, Japan** and **Belgium** called for efforts to reduce redundancies between its work and that of other UN entities.

Some Member States highlighted the need for closer coordination with specific arms of the UN system, including the forthcoming HLPF on sustainable development (**Switzerland, Belgium, Bangladesh**); the Bretton Woods Institutions (**Finland, Australia, South Africa, Italy, Bangladesh, Mexico**); the Peacebuilding Commission (**Italy, Croatia**); UN Environment Programme (**Sri Lanka**) and the Security Council (**Belarus**).

Regarding other international organizations and bodies, **South Africa** stressed the importance of working more closely with the World Trade Organization and **Mexico** supported greater collaboration between ECOSOC and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. **Russia** and **South Africa** encouraged stronger interaction and coherence with the G20.

The **United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, France, and the Republic of Korea** called on ECOSOC to interact more effectively with civil society, with **Belgium** emphasizing the value of the Council's historic transparency and openness to groups from this sector. Additionally the **United Kingdom** pointed to the importance of collaborating with the private sector as well as philanthropic institutions. Both the **United Kingdom and the United States** drew attention to the importance of interacting with academia in order to make informed decisions based on empirical evidence.

VI. Working Methods

Germany, Latvia, Mauritius and Peru stressed the need to reform the working methods of ECOSOC. **South Africa** and **Peru** called for streamlining the MDGs and the SDGs, whilst **Spain** and the **UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)** proposed that ECOSOC's work should converge towards sustainable development.

India suggested that the quality of the work of the subsidiary commissions needs to be improved. The **Bahamas, Indonesia** and **Colombia** promoted more participation and coordination of the subsidiary commissions with the Council's central work.



The **Bahamas** stressed the need to enhance the quality of the Annual Ministerial Meeting (AMR) generally, while **Ukraine** stated that the National Voluntary Presentations (NVPs) should be enhanced.

Argentina, Barbados and Pakistan called for improved follow-up to the implementation of ECOSOC resolutions and decisions. Furthermore, the **Bahamas, Barbados and United States** called for regularly monitoring activities regarding coordination and coherence within the ECOSOC framework. **Ecuador** stressed the need to introduce new metrics to evaluate progress made towards the achievement of sustainable development.

Italy called for more flexibility within the Council, and **Belgium** stressed the need for transparency. **Germany and Indonesia** put emphasis on the efficient use of resources within ECOSOC's activities.

Bangladesh proposed the creation of a Forum for Ministers of Finance and Economy on economic issues to close the gap in global macroeconomic coherence and governance.

Colombia stressed the need to reduce the focus on negotiated decisions and outcomes, recommending establishment of small drafting groups in order to foster substantive outcomes, without reducing the legitimacy of ECOSOC's decisions.

VII. Follow-up to major UN conferences

The **European Union, Slovakia, Kyrgyzstan, Croatia, and India** drew attention to the importance of ECOSOC effectively following up on major UN conferences. **Finland and Ecuador** expressed their concern about the lack of concrete decisions at conferences, hampering an effective follow-up process. **Nepal, Ecuador and Nicaragua** called for enhancing compliance with commitments made at conferences and for a better tracking of results achieved.

VIII. Structure of agenda and schedule

Spain, Pakistan, India, Colombia, and Switzerland stressed the need to streamline the Council's agenda. **Pakistan** asked if it would be beneficial if the segment-based approach was realigned to the three "pillar" approach, with segments devoted to (i) economic, (ii) social and (iii) environmental challenges. **Colombia** proposed a threefold structure clustered around the issues of (i) poverty; (ii) inequality; and (iii) sustainable production and consumption patterns. **Switzerland** proposed a differentiation between the technical (guidance, coordination and review of subsidiary bodies' work) and political dimensions (social and economic issues). **Argentina** expressed the need to restructure the agenda in line with specific priorities (e.g. economic growth, social inclusion, employment and industrial policy). **Spain** expressed the need to concentrate on specific issues related to the three pillars of sustainable development.



Colombia proposed a reform of the general schedule of ECOSOC, with the aim to (i) distribute comprehensive questionnaires to subsidiary bodies in May annually; and (ii) collect and evaluate them through DESA and the Regional Commissions in June for general oversight and the formulation of policy recommendations. The resulting brief reports on trends and policy options from the global and regional perspectives would be discussed in the substantive session in July. **Colombia** also proposed having the High-Level Segment at the end of ECOSOC so that ministers could agree on concrete actions and policies. For 2013, **Colombia** regards the MDG review and the design of the post-2015 development agenda as priority issues for discussion. **Indonesia** equally stressed that ECOSOC must be active in preparing the post-2015 development agenda.

ECLAC presented a proposal for the ECOSOC session in 2013 which should include: (i) a coordination and preparatory segment for the HLPF on Sustainable Development; (ii) an integration segment in which all ECOSOC subsidiary bodies report to each other, thus fostering system-wide coherence; (iii) the AMR to discuss the sequencing of sustainable development transitions; and (iv) a high-level dialogue that would focus further on the post-2015 development agenda.

Guatemala stated that there is no compelling reason for a yearly four-week session.

IX. Closing Remarks

On behalf of Mr. Wu, **Mr. Navid Hanif, Director, Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination, DESA**, thanked the attendees for their participation. With reference to the Rio+20 outcome document, he outlined the essential elements necessary for an effective multilateral system for sustainable development. Such a system would need to: (i) promote a shared analysis of issues and challenges, and facilitate agreement on objectives and approaches for their achievement; (ii) encourage implementation of these policies; (iii) address deficits in policy coherence; and (iv) fully integrate the economic, social and environmental pillars. The Council's promotion of international dialogue on global trends on a vast range of issues (such as, population and development; science and technology; gender) connects well to the three interrelated pillars of sustainable development. For this reason, the ECOSOC system is well placed to continue its leadership by: (i) reviewing the implementation of the global development agenda, including the MDGs; (ii) integrating the sustainable development pillars; and (iii) contributing to ongoing preparations for a post-2015 development agenda.

H.E. Mr. Miloš Koterec, President of ECOSOC, thanked the participants for their interactive engagement and exchange of ideas. He highlighted some of the concrete points made during the meeting which he suggested guide future discussions on the features and capabilities of an effective multilateral system for sustainable development. Such a system should be capable of: (i) integrating the three pillars of sustainable development by building on existing knowledge and expertise to find solutions to global problems; (ii) providing policy guidance to address and



reconcile trade-offs between competing policy priorities; (iii) prioritizing an outcome-drive agenda and ensuring effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation; (iv) redesigning the Council's system of subsidiary bodies and restructuring its Secretariat support; and (v) expanding partnerships with the growing multitude of development partners, including academia, the private sector and regional and sub-regional institutions. He concluded by reasserting the Bureau's commitment to increase the inclusiveness and effectiveness of ECOSOC.

Specific reform proposals

Annual calendar

- Distribute ECOSOC sessions throughout the year. (Guatemala, Colombia, Pakistan)
- Proposed annual schedule (Colombia):
 - May*: Simple questionnaire to be distributed subsidiary bodies
 - June*: DESA and regional commissions to be tasked with evaluating responses, identifying trends and common concerns. DESA to prepare concise global report and regional commissions a regional report..
 - July*: High-Level Segment should be held at the conclusion of the Substantive Session to approve policy recommendations
- Proposed schedule (ECLAC):
 1. Coordination session: to align with preparations for the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development;
 2. Integration session: subsidiary bodies report to ECOSOC and to each other
 3. Annual Ministerial Review: consider sequencing towards SDGs
 4. High-Level Dialogue within the GA to discuss Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Agenda

- Better division of labour and reduce duplication between ECOSOC, GA, and PBC agenda (Italy, Pakistan, Croatia)
- Establish itself as the centre for shared analysis of risks for the UN development system, a particularly suitable role for the Council given its role in system-wide coherence and coordination (Slovakia).
- Restructure ECOSOC agenda according to specific development priorities such as growth, social inclusion, employment and industrial policy, science and technology, financing (Argentina) and global crises (Mr. Akram)
- Cluster ECOSOC's work around three main domains: (1) poverty, (2) inequality, and (3) sustainable production and consumption patterns. (Colombia)
- Streamline agenda along two dimensions: (1) *technically* on guidance, coordination and the review of subsidiary bodies, and (2) *politically* on social and economic issues. (Switzerland)



- Issues to be discussed in 2013: (1) MDG Review, (2) Post-2015 Development Agenda and (3) Sustainable Development Goals. (Colombia)

Structure and working methods

- Within ECOSOC, create a group of 27 members (“the L-27”), with some permanent members and others rotating to ensure effective and representative decision-making. (Mr. Akram)
- Strengthen the ECOSOC Secretariat. (Guatemala). Establish a technically competent secretariat drawn from UN system secretariats of functional commissions. (Mr. Akram)
- Conduct a follow-up to and evaluation of the implementation of ECOSOC resolutions and decisions. (Argentina, Barbados, Pakistan)
- Regular monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of coordination and coherence within the ECOSOC system. (Bahamas)
- Create Forum for Ministers of Finance and Economy on economic issues. (Bangladesh)
- Create small technical drafting groups for resolutions and decisions to ensure substantive outcomes. Move away from negotiated outcomes. (Colombia)
- Discuss ECOSOC reform and coherence of the institutional framework in tandem with the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. (Brazil)
- Expand partnerships with academia, civil society and the private sector (Belgium, UK, Republic of Korea, US, Mr. Wirth)
- Merge normative and operational aspects of ECOSOC mandate. (Indonesia, Latvia)

