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United Nations System-wide Coherence: Governance
**Joint Statement by the UN General Assembly Co-Chairs
on System-wide Coherence**

**Opening Statement
Delivered by**

H.E. Ambassador Paul Kavanagh

**Permanent Representative of Ireland
to the United Nations, New York**

at Informal Consultations in the General Assembly

Thursday, 17 April 2008

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of my colleague as Co-Chair Ambassador Mahiga and on my own behalf I would like to welcome you to these open consultations on Governance aspects of the Report of the High Level Panel on System-wide Coherence.

Delegations will have heard this morning a substantial briefing from representatives of the UN Development System on issues relating to an empowered Resident Coordinator System. This morning's further briefing on developments at country level has thus helped to set the scene for the discussion that we will now have on the over-arching issue of Governance, bearing in mind that Governance responses at the centre need to correspond to, and complement, developments at country-level and vice versa. This afternoon we could perhaps consider in particular the intergovernmental aspects of the overall Governance question.

Before doing so, and since the questions are related, I would like, at this point in time, to draw some elements from the principal concerns expressed during our open consultation of 7 April on Funding.

In light of last week's consultation on Funding and of other open consultations in the course of this process, your Co-Chairs believe that there is a consensus in the General Assembly that any cost-savings which are made - including through application of 'Delivering as One' approach - should be ploughed back into programme work at country level in the countries where the savings are realised. In this connection, concerns have been voiced by States and by representatives of Agencies, Funds and Programmes that insufficient effect is being given to this, the consensus view of member States. We look forward to our calls on the executive leadership of the Specialised Agencies in Paris, Geneva and Rome, beginning next week. We will be seeking further information, inter alia, on progress in implementing this consensus provision of the Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review (TCPR) Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly. This matter needs to be actively pursued by the headquarters, regional and country levels, so that current ad hoc arrangements

for the reinvestment of savings are improved upon and appropriate arrangements are placed on a more sustainable footing.

We also noted well the support which we heard from many member States in relation to the alignment of the budget cycles of the Funds, Programmes and Agencies. This is a recommendation in the Panel report that is aimed at facilitating strategic coordination and we will also be making enquiries into progress in this regard in the course of our upcoming mission.

Another issue which has been repeatedly raised by member States and which had been highlighted in the Panel Report itself is the continuing imbalance between core and non-core funding. In the recently adopted TCPR consensus resolution (62/208) it was acknowledged that core resources continue to be the bedrock of the operational activities for development of the United Nations System - and that the share of core contributions to the UN Funds and Programmes had declined in recent years. The TCPR recognises the need to address the imbalance between core and non-core resources. It seems to be beyond question that there must be an increase in core resources if the UN, even in its current configuration and all the more so if it is to move forward, is to be able to function more efficiently, coherently and effectively. Many member States also called for a review of the policy of 'zero real growth', which was highlighted in the Panel Report as an issue of concern and which may have implications for the ability of the Specialised Agencies to fulfil their role as global standard-setters in their respective fields of mandated expertise.

We also heard from diverse parts of the membership that predictable multi-year funding is essential for the UN to be more coherent and effective. If programmes are to have a strategic focus, they must be supported by funding which is multi-annual and flexible. Heavily-earmarked funding or fragmented funding will not build a solid and effective UN, but rather encourage further fragmentation.

Concerns were also raised that the call to donors to increase pooled funding to pilots and to increasingly refrain from country level interventions outside the

One UN country programme would leave non-pilots deprived of funding. In the view of the Co-Chairs the High Level Panel could hardly have intended, through its recommendations, to leave non-pilots deprived of funding. It would seem necessary, in view of the concerns expressed, to underline explicitly that - in keeping with the voluntary nature of the 'Delivering as One' process, and with the principle that 'no one size fits all' - funding for the implementation of the High Level Panel's recommendations at country level is in addition to existing resources.

Commitment to coherence at country level may indeed involve a short term form of additionality in order to meet transaction costs etc. But it must also be accompanied, in order to be fully in accord with the Panel recommendations, by long term reinforcement of resources of a core nature. To do anything less than this would be to run the risk that the partial adoption of the High Level Panel's recommendations would actually lead to further fragmentation. In order to remove any sense of threat which could be felt by any country or Agency that non-participation in the 'Delivering as One' process might result in decreased funding, it may be necessary for development partners to give firm assurances that the dual nature of the Panel's recommendations, that is reinforcement of resources at both country and core level, will be supported. The modalities of how this parallel commitment could be achieved would seem to require further clarification.

The TCPR consensus resolution provides the bedrock upon which we might build in addressing this issue. In this regard, I recall Ambassador Mahiga's citing on 7 April of paragraph 32 of that resolution. It

Quote

'emphasises that increasing financial contributions to the United Nations development system is key to achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, and in this regard recognizes the mutually reinforcing links between increased

effectiveness, efficiency and coherence of the United Nations development system, achieving concrete results in assisting developing countries to eradicate poverty and achieve sustained economic growth and sustainable development through operational activities for development and the overall resourcing of the United Nations development system’.

Unquote

This paragraph can provide us with an agreed starting point for a closer examination of how coherence in the field can be supported, but only in the context of a commitment to the reinvestment of any savings into programmes, to meeting any necessary transition costs in adopting greater coherence, and to sustained and predictable financial support to core activities in the UN development system.

In the TCPR resolution, the Assembly found a way to embrace side by side a number of concepts without embracing that of new conditionalities. In leaving behind such a concept – which clearly is not acceptable to the Assembly – we might be moving in a positive, win-win frame of mind, towards a UN system that is more efficient, more coherent, more effective and at the same time better resourced. A UN ‘Delivering as One’ would thereby truly deliver more.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me turn now to the subject of this afternoon’s open consultation.

The High Level Panel in its consideration of Governance questions made a number of key recommendations which proposed to consolidate some functions and strengthen others. The Panel’s recommendations fell broadly into three categories, the organisational level, the regional level and the intergovernmental level.

With regard to the organisational level a substantial part of this work falls within the remit of the Secretariat and specifically the Chief Executives Board (CEB) to examine and to carry forward. As delegations will be aware the Secretary-General will address

the Assembly in mid May on Business Practices in this context. That will be an opportunity to reflect upon how the UN's managerial support systems, within their competencies, are making progress in underpinning enhanced coherence at country level.

In addition, we have heard this morning that progress has been made by the Funds and Programmes in streamlining work at the regional level. Moreover, the regional dimension is dealt with by the General Assembly in considerable detail in operative paragraphs 106-111 of the consensus TCPR Resolution. This section of the TCPR requests the United Nations development system to strengthen cooperation and coordination at the regional level, among the Funds, Programmes and Agencies as well as other Regional Commissions, with the respective Headquarters and in closer cooperation with the Resident Coordinator system, so that they may further develop their capacities to support country level development initiatives. The System is also requested to increase collaboration with other regional and subregional intergovernmental institutions and banks.

This afternoon's discussions might perhaps focus on the recommendations at intergovernmental level by the High Level Panel.

Our distinguished predecessors as Co-Chairs, during the 61st Session of the Assembly, reported that the major concerns raised by member States about the recommendations contained in the Governance component of the High Level Panel's Report related to the possible erosion of national ownership of the UN intergovernmental processes, duplication of existing mandates and functions of the Executive Boards, as well as a need for more information in support of the roles and responsibilities of the bodies proposed. The then Co-Chairs also reported that while it was recognised that institutional reform would be necessary to support reform at the country level, some member States expressed the view that institutional reform should be undertaken within existing frameworks such as the TCPR.

Delegations will be aware, of course, that since the writing of the report of our predecessors, the Annual Ministerial Review took place in Geneva in July of last year, within the context of a strengthened ECOSOC. The Development Cooperation Forum

is due to take place within the same context in July of this year. A question which delegations may wish, therefore, to consider is whether these bodies together with the TCPR can have a meaningful policy role in support of coherence at country level. This combination of policy consideration within the Annual Ministerial Review and the Development Cooperation Forum may represent a step in the direction indicated by the High Level Panel and member States may wish to consider whether this is itself a sufficient degree of progress.

With regard to the consideration of operational matters, there is a question as to whether the introduction of new bodies such as a Sustainable Development Board would have an impact on the function of existing bodies relating to development. A question which has been asked by some members of the General Assembly does appear valid: How can governance at the headquarters level be in full and supportive conformity with what is foreseen, and nationally led, at the country level? How can a One UN Plan which has been arrived at through a nationally owned and led process be suitably dealt with at central level? Member States may wish to consider whether the incremental progress which is being made with regard to joint board consideration of One UN Programmes agreed at country level addresses sufficiently the necessary balance between agreed principles of national ownership of development strategies and adequate mechanisms for intergovernmental oversight.

The High Level Panel Report also foresaw that System-wide Coherence at the United Nations could not be discussed in a vacuum. It argued that it needed to be placed in a broader contextual framework of a dynamic international setting in which there are a large number of other relevant international actors and efforts. The international development agenda was, in the Panel's view, a result of the internationally agreed development goals and of platforms for their implementation through nationally owned development strategies and support by the development partners. This would require credible engagement of the United Nations with other development actors, since the success of this common agenda could only be realized through coherence in implementation. In that context the report foresaw a closer and more systematic relationship between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions and made some recommendations in this regard. Member States may wish to consider how these recommendations could be usefully pursued.

The report which our predecessors provided to the President of the General Assembly referred to those who saw a continuing role for the TCPR in respect of the General Assembly's ability to provide operational guidelines for the development system. The outcome of the recent negotiation of the TCPR would seem to indicate strong grounds for retaining that Resolution as a source of principles and guidelines for the UN development system - which nevertheless permits and indeed supports continued national ownership and direction of development strategies. Unless member States wish to indicate the contrary, the Co-Chairs would feel entitled to believe that this consensus document remains a strong frame within which the guidance which the Assembly wishes to give, both at policy and operational level, to the entire UN development system, can be achieved.

As always, the Co-Chairs are anxious to hear the views of member States and we are grateful for your ongoing participation in these consultations. As delegations indicated already, we intend to schedule a meeting in mid-May which would be attended by the Secretary-General to brief the membership on Harmonisation of Business Practices. We would also envisage in May a consultation on issues related to Gender. As indicated previously, we would intend to focus considerable energy on this issue in the latter part of our mandate. In addition to points which may be raised today relating to Governance, if member States wish to explore other matters we will, as Co-Chairs, be pleased to consider ways in which these can be addressed.

I would flag to delegations that the Co-Chairs would now envisage providing their report to the President of the General Assembly in the second half of June. The drafting of our report will be informed by the consultations that will have been undertaken in this open format, as well as by our various other contacts, and not least by the intensive consultations which we would undertake with member States in varying formats before our report is finalised. Our overall approach to our work going forward was reiterated in our joint opening and closing statements on 7 April. We are gratified that these clarifying statements were subsequently warmly welcomed by the leadership of the Coordinating Group that had previously expressed concern in this regard.

With those opening remarks, I open the floor to those delegations which would like to make an intervention.

Thank you.