

**Statement by His Excellency Oh Joon
President of the Economic and Social Council**

**ECOSOC Organisational Meeting
Thursday, 28 July, 2016**

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentleman,

The 2016 session marked a landmark year for the Council.

It was the year in which we moved from commitments to actions by supporting the early implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other critical global agreements of 2015.

As I close this chapter of my work with the Council, I remain grateful to you for entrusting me with this enormous responsibility.

My task was made much easier by the support of my colleagues in the Bureau, Ambassadors Frederick Shava of Zimbabwe, Jürg Lauber of Switzerland, Sven Jürgenson of Estonia, and Hector Palma Cerna of Honduras. I truly appreciate their steadfast commitment to ECOSOC.

I would also like to extend my warmest congratulations to Ambassador Shava on his election as President, as well as to the members of the new Bureau.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Development is one of the three pillars in the work of the UN, and ECOSOC is the Charter body mandated with a central role in this crucial effort. The Council has been built on the belief that economic and social progress is essential in the promotion of peaceful relations among nations, as well as human rights and dignity.

Having celebrated the 70th anniversary of ECOSOC, and faced with a variety of global challenges, we have set off on a journey to achieve the most ambitious development agenda in history.

The world is changing. Change has been brought about by a confluence of factors stemming from globalization, such as highly mobile goods and services, large-scale human migration, and seemingly endless innovation in science and technology.

Globalization is not a neutral process. Though there are significantly positive effects on people's well-being, it is also true that some are gaining more than others. For too many, the benefits of globalization either come too slowly or not at all. Inequalities are rising, making more people's lives difficult. Unsustainable production and consumption have led to global climate change which threatens the very future of the planet.

A central challenge for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), therefore, is to ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for development for all of humanity. To succeed, we need the United Nations, and ECOSOC in particular, to be fit for this purpose.

Indeed, our efforts throughout the 2016 session have taken the work of the Council towards that direction.

The High-level Political Forum(HLPF) on Sustainable Development was successfully held with the theme of "Ensuring that no one is left behind". The national reviews of 22 volunteer countries have set an excellent stage for the follow-up and review of the SDGs for years to come.

The entire ECOSOC system including functional and regional commissions, committees, and expert bodies have contributed to advancing sustainable development. The Council provided leadership and policy guidance for integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development. We have explored ways for the UN system to respond more effectively to changes in the development landscape as well as to humanitarian emergencies.

All our discussions in the 2016 session point to the imperative of new ways of thinking and working by engaging all stakeholders. We have become more aware that the 2030 Agenda can only be properly achieved through inclusive partnerships and by taking care of the most vulnerable and marginalized first. Involving people in policy-decisions result in better outcomes, which can impact every corner of the world, region, and community.

Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentleman,

It has been a great privilege for me to serve in the ECOSOC Bureau for the past two and a half years – one and a half as Vice President and one year as President.

Allow me to share with you a few thoughts from my experience in the Council. I would like to address three key challenges which I think ECOSOC is faced with today. These could be considered in strengthening the work of the ECOSOC.

First, it is high time for us to seriously think about how to develop the structure of the ECOSOC system to make it fit for purpose, in the context of the entire UN development system.

New meetings held by ECOSOC, such as the HLPF, the Financing for Development (FfD) Forum, or the Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) Forum, allow all UN Member States to participate on equal footing in the key issue areas of SDGs implementation. This is the right approach, not least given the importance of the development agenda for the global community.

However, while the new tasks given to ECOSOC help strengthen its function, they also raise questions about the original mandates of the Council and powers of its 54 elected members, as provided in the Charter.

To put it simply, now that an important part of ECOSOC's work is to prepare and hold these all-UN-member forums, the Council has got to operating in the structure of the General Assembly when it comes to development issues. And the mandate areas designated to the ECOSOC members by the Charter have become blurred.

I do not mean to say that these changes are problematic. But if they are necessary for our new SDG era, we should incorporate them in the context of considering fundamental changes to the structure. Reform should come as a result of comprehensive efforts with a vision, not of piecemeal negotiations.

What could be of help in this regard is the ECOSOC Dialogue on the Longer-term Positioning of the UN Development System. Appointed by the ECOSOC Bureau, an Independent Team of Advisers contributed to the Dialogue with concrete proposals for reforms to tackle new challenges.

These include measures to enhance system-wide governance of the UN development system, such as a full-time President of ECOSOC, the establishment of a Sustainable Development Board, and a review of the composition and working methods of governing bodies. Starting with these proposals, we need to consider how to strengthen the coordinating role of ECOSOC in the UN's development efforts. We must admit the lack of coordination in the current state of play and have to work together to find ways to enhance coordination in the system.

Second, the agenda and working methods of the Council must be more relevant in responding to global changes. We need to review the agenda more systematically to see to it that no items remain merely due to inertia.

An important way of enhancing the agenda's relevance can be found in the Council's timely responses to emergency situations. During my time in the Bureau, there have been three special meetings that addressed global emergencies, coming from Ebola, the Zika virus, and El Niño. These meetings provided timely and credible information on emerging crises and supported the search for joint solutions.

Reducing inequality was also a significant theme during my presidency. The Special Meeting on Inequality held last March reaffirmed the need for the Council to address cross-cutting issues such as inequality that have the potential to jeopardize the achievement of the SDGs.

The 2030 Agenda calls for bringing in new voices. We need to think about how we can better connect with discussions and events taking place outside the walls of this Chamber. As such, ECOSOC's unique mandate to engage civil society is critically important. In this regard, I have recently sent a letter to the Chair of the Committee on NGOs to consider improving the working methods of the Committee so that decisions on the applications of NGOs for consultative status can be facilitated.

As for the Council's working methods, my experience points to a collective wisdom that, while the principle of consensus building must continue to be respected, it should not work as if every Member State has veto power and is able to block the work of the Council.

Third, our new mindset and attitude, particularly a renewed spirit of cooperation, are required to overcome the outdated divide between the groups of developed and developing countries.

Development is a unique and outstanding area in the UN's work where a win-win approach is not only possible, but almost inevitable. For instance, both developed and developing countries need each other to ensure successful development cooperation. Developed countries would not be able to make effective use of their ODA without active cooperation of their partners in the developing world. Likewise, it is vital for developing countries to work with developed partners for any meaningful results of development cooperation.

The efforts and commitments of all Member States to ensure win-win outcomes are critical in the work of the entire UN development system, let alone that of ECOSOC. The Council should by all means remain the central platform for collaboration of the global south and north.

Ladies and Gentleman,

I am glad that all of us in ECOSOC, equipped with the tools of a strengthened Council, have done our best to live up to the new challenges of the SDG era. We have been propelled by a spirit of devotion and cooperation to become trailblazers in our quest of human dignity and prosperity for all.

I am convinced that over the last year the Council was proactive in taking steps to build synergies between its mandates and the vision of the 2030 Agenda. That is why I feel extremely privileged and humbled to hand the presidency to the new President. Even after leaving the presidency, ECOSOC will certainly be in my mind whatever I will be doing, and my small contribution will continue, even if not seen by anyone.

Once again, I thank you all for having worked with me for the last two and a half years – the Vice Presidents, the Council members, those in DESA and DGACM, all development actors, members of the media, interpreters, and the security officers.

I have no doubt that all of you will make the next session of ECOSOC much more successful.

Thank you and goodbye. /END/