



# ECOSOC

United Nations Economic and Social Council

**TAKING ACTION TO IMPROVE LIVES**

## **Statement by His Excellency Munir Akram, President of ECOSOC**

### **Joint meeting of the Second Committee of the General Assembly at its 75th session and the Economic and Social Council**

14 October 2020

Thank you, Thank you.

Mr. Chairman of the committee.

I would like to welcome all of you to this joint meeting of the Second Committee of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.

As we all know, we are in the midst of the most serious crisis in the history of the United Nations. This is of course a health and an economic crisis: the greatest recession we have faced since 1930.

But it is, in fact, a triple crisis. A crisis, spread by the COVID-19 pandemic; the impending crisis of climate change, as well as the crisis of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

We were offtrack from the realization of these goals even before the pandemic. And after that, we are in a much more serious and challenging situation.

It is obvious that since these are multiple, and simultaneous crises that are facing us. The response to these triple crises must also be simultaneous and synergetic.

Our response in the recovery should be such that it can also contribute to the promotion of the SDGs and to the avoidance of the climate disaster, which we may face.

We are scheduled to speak today on two key issues.

One is the issue of emphasis on sustainable infrastructure and the second science and technology. But in addressing these the first challenge we have and the key to our response will be finance.

And I believe that finances which are required for recovery from the pandemic is the first test of the international response that we need to enable developing countries to recover from this pandemic to avoid the trap of debt sustainability, or unsustainability, as well as the problem of corporate debt that could lead to economic collapse in so many developing countries.

We are at a moment when there is, I believe, considerable concern among developing countries at the level of response that has been evoked by the COVID Pandemic.

Our partners in the developed world have mobilized \$13 trillion to provide a stimulus for their economies to recover from this COVID crisis whereas the developing countries are struggling to find even a fraction of \$2.5 trillion, which the IMF has estimated as being the minimum requirement for developing countries to recover from this crisis.

Until we are able to mobilize those resources for the developing countries, I believe the discussions on the structure of our response on SDGs or infrastructure, as well as on the other issues related to SDGs and climate change will not be successful. Because the developing countries may not be in a position to actually implement the

objectives which they have set out in the national development plans and set out in the VNRs which have been presented to the ECOSOC in the past year.

So today, I think we must start by appealing to the international community to the international institutions and mainly to those countries which have the capacity to provide liquidity into the international system to respond generously and respond in time to avert the impending chaos and crisis that face the developing countries at this time.

Today the topics we have chosen are well considered.

I believe sustainable infrastructure impacts 92% of all the SDGs.

Sustainable infrastructure is a vehicle through which we will be able to transition from the fossil fuel economy into a green economy, and therefore we must find ways in which to mobilize the investment required for sustainable infrastructure development in the developing countries.

The requirement is estimated to be, at least, \$2 trillion in investment in sustainable infrastructure in the developing countries per year.

We have a gap of about 1.5 trillion in such investment and we need to find the ways to generate that investment.

The money is there.

There are more than \$10 trillion sitting into negative interest earning accounts in the market.

This money could be more productively deployed for infrastructure investment in developing countries. And yet there are insufficient opportunities for the private sector, and even for public finance: there are insufficient projects that are available for investment in infrastructure. As such the private sector is looking for those opportunities, but those projects, the pipeline of projects, which they are looking for is not available.

I believe that there is a gap and that gap can be filled by the available International machinery. The United Nations has got 193 plus country offices, resident coordinators and resident representatives of the United Nations Development Program. These are even more than the representatives from the World Bank and other institutions.

These country offices must be utilized for interaction with the developing countries with a view to identify the projects that these countries wish to promote. And through such identification facilitate the preparation of those projects: pre-feasibility and the feasibility studies of such projects, and then bring those projects to private investors to public institutions that are investors in infrastructure.

In order to mobilize the actual investment that is required in developing countries. I have proposed a sustainable infrastructure investments facility to this end, and I look forward to further consultations and discussions with all parties concerned.

This could be a public private partnership, under the rubric of the United Nations, and could be a useful vehicle.

In order to promote infrastructure investment in the developing countries.

As regard to science and technology, and my colleague, and distinguished Chairman of this committee has spoken about the technological divide between developed and developing countries.

This is of course an enormous gulf that needs to be bridged.

The issue is from where should we start, and how should we address this in specific terms.

Again, I believe the United Nations system has the capacity. Specifically, the UNDP and the UNCTAD have the capacity to contribute to bridging this technological divide. Some specific areas, which I have tried to identify in this respect, are the following:

Firstly, I think the whole experience with the COVID crisis and the development of the vaccine has indicated that once the international community has identified a target for the application of research and development, science and technology and corresponding resources become available for such research and development.

The vaccine has attracted over \$35 billion in indirect support to the companies, which are developing the Vaccine.

In a similar way, I think if we are able to identify what is it that we need in terms of research and development objectives for developing countries, what are the breakthroughs we need in science and technology or in the application of existing technologies in developing countries. I think we can mobilize the resources from public and private sources.

Secondly, there is I think a major area where we can have a transformation. And this is the whole intellectual property regime, which can be helpful, but which can also sometimes restrain developing countries from acquiring and adapting new technologies.

I believe a discussion on the alignment of the intellectual property regime. With the SDGs would be a very useful, useful exploration. I believe we need to think of how we can use the IP as a source of identifying technologies that are about on the cusp of a breakthrough identifying where intellectual property regime relaxation may contribute to development.

So this is a discussion I believe that we need to have in the United Nations.

And last but not least, is what the chairman of the second committee, mentioned, is the digital divide.

There has a lot has been said about the digital divide. And today, of course, there is a huge gulf between the developing countries, and the developed countries, but in fact, the real capacity in the digital space is possessed by only two countries. And the rest of us are lagging behind.

We have to see how we can encompass the cooperation from these two countries with the largest technology and IT companies that they have that they host, how we can build a universal system of a digitalized global economy, I think we need cooperation from both sides, and we need that cooperation in the United Nations. And what is of great danger is the danger of East-West digital divide, because if there is an East West digital divide. It will also translate into intensifying North-South digital divide.

And this is an issue, I believe, which requires consideration within the United Nations in the second committee and in the economic and social council.

So these are some of the issues I thought I should identify put on the table, and I look forward to an interesting discussion we have some very eminent panelists, who will be speaking in our discussion, and I look forward to benefiting from the views of these panelists.

I thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

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