



Check against delivery

**2021 Organizational Session: First Informal Meeting
Election of the Bureau of ECOSOC**

Opening Statement
by
Ambassador Munir Akram
Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations

23 July 2020

Excellencies,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to commence by thanking Ambassador Mona Juul, for her leadership of the Council during these extraordinary times. It has been a pleasure and an honour to serve as one of your Vice Presidents and work with you to ensure that ECOSOC continues to deliver on its important mandate during this time of crisis.

I am honoured to have the opportunity to preside over the Council for a second time especially when we will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the UN and the ECOSOC.

Pakistan is assuming the Presidency of the Economic and Social Council for the sixth time in the midst of the most serious global threat faced by the international community since the establishment of the United Nations.

The ECOSOC's central mandate is to promote "better standards of life in larger freedoms" through international economic cooperation. Over the past 75 years, for multiple reasons, the ECOSOC has struggled to fulfill the policy and coordination mandate assigned to it by the Charter. Never before has the fulfillment of this mandate been more challenging or more imperative as it is today.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 Pandemic has engulfed the world even as global economic growth was slowing and the prospects of timely achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs were receding.

The COVID-19 pandemic is both a health and an economic crisis. The virus has killed thousands and infected millions in every corner of the world. It has triggered the greatest recession since the “great depression” of the 1930s.

As usual, the poorest and most vulnerable countries and groups will suffer the most. Developing countries need the fiscal space to redress the health emergency, revive economic growth and achieve the SDG targets.

The COVID-19 crisis has thrown into bold relief the inherent inequalities embedded in the global financial and economic system. The advanced countries which issue reserve currencies have been able to generate nearly \$10 Trillion in budget deficits of between 10-20 percent of GDP to finance their response to the pandemic and economic recovery. The developing countries cannot do so. Their spending is so far restrained to between 1-2 percent of GDP. They must rely on external funding and policy support to respond to the pandemic and to recover from the recession.

The COVID-19 crisis has illustrated, brutally, the essential unity of humanity. The pandemic has evoked unusual expressions of solidarity and support among and within States.

But, it has also witnessed some shameful demonstrations of national and sub-national selfishness, of a debilitating blame game, of discrimination against and victimization of the poor, the vulnerable and minorities.

A Covid-19 vaccine will be developed, we hope soon. Everyone, everywhere – rich or poor – must have equal access to the vaccine.

COVID-19, SDGs, Climate Change

In fact, today, Member States face three simultaneous global challenges: the COVID pandemic and its consequences, the realization of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs and the existential threat of Climate catastrophe. Each of these challenges encompasses the mandate of ECOSOC.

It is now obvious that the COVID crisis and recession, imposed on an already slowing world economy, will make the realization of the

SDGs even more challenging and difficult. Over a hundred million people in the developing countries are likely to be pushed back into extreme poverty, eroding a decade's struggle for growth and development.

Meanwhile, global warming is accelerating, generating ever more frequent extreme climate events. Unless we can implement the agreed goals of the Paris Agreements, within the envisaged timeframe, we face the real prospect of making our planet uninhabitable for humanity and for all living things.

Areas of Focus

The broad policy decisions to address each of these three simultaneous challenges have been taken. Commitments have been made. What is needed now is implementation. The focus of all our deliberations must be on how we will execute our decisions and fulfill our commitments in these three areas. And, since we need to respond simultaneously, there must be synergy between our responses to the health, development and climate challenges. I believe this is implied in the Secretary General's call to "Build Back Better".

As the Secretary-General also stated on 18 July, in his Nelson Mandela lecture: “Inequality defines our times.” Twenty-six people own half the world’s wealth. Inequality is growing within and among nations.

The legacy of colonialism and racism is a major systemic cause of inequality. I will propose to the Council that we convene a special meeting in 2021 – the 20th Anniversary of the Durban Conference against Racism – to address the root causes of global inequality. The 10th Anniversary of the ECOSOC Youth Forum should also promote the vision of a more equal, peaceful, united and dynamic world order.

The endeavour to end inequality must infuse every process to promote the SDGs and prevent environmental degradation. Yet, equality is not equal for unequals. Inequality can be ended only by affirmative action. This implies the consistent application of the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and treatment, not only in combating climate change, but also in advancing the SDGs and in restructuring the international financial and trade architecture and the system of global governance. It also implies special attention to disadvantaged countries – the least developed, and landlocked countries and the small island developing countries – and to disadvantaged and

vulnerable groups within countries – the poor and destitute, women and children, the displaced and refugees.

I will reappoint a group of friends to proactively prepare the interaction on the VNRs at the next HLPF. We will also use the 2021 Development Cooperation Forum to foster a coherent and SDG-oriented development cooperation system.

Excellencies, Ladies & Gentlemen,

The ECOSOC has the unique mandate to convene special meetings on urgent and emerging issues.

I believe that in the coming year we should promote specific actions in three areas: one, financing of the COVID-19, SDG and Climate goals; two, sustainable infrastructure development, and three, application of advanced science and technology for sustained, efficient and sustainable growth. This is critical to create a fair, equitable and resilient global economy.

Financing

Finance is the key to recovery from the current crisis and to restore the world on the path to the SDGs.

Several actions have been taken to generate financing to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, including the UN's humanitarian emergency initiative and the recovery fund; the IMF's \$100 billion emergency facility; the World Bank's plan to disburse \$160 billion over the next 15 months; and the G20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) for 73 eligible countries.

But, much more is needed.

The IMF Director General has estimated that the developing countries will need over \$2.5 trillion in financing to recover from the impact of the pandemic and regain the path towards the SDGs.

As early as last April, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, launched a "Global Initiative on Debt Relief". A representative group has commenced informal consultations to evolve practical and early measures.

The UNSG, Canada and Jamaica have launched a process to generate the required financing to respond to the crisis and recover better for sustainability.

There are a number of proposals on the table: the extension of the period and scope of the G20's DSSI; debt relief and restructuring; private sector participation in the debt suspension; contributions of the MDBs; reallocation of SDRs and issuance of new SDRs; enhanced access to capital markets; currency swaps; debt swaps; a new IMF lending facility, rationalization of tax systems and fiscal policy and arresting illicit financial flows, on which the FACTI Panel will submit its recommendations during the year. The Addis Ababa Action Plan envisages most of these options.

The ECOSOC should help to build a coordinated approach to ensure the required capital flows to developing countries and develop consensus on the measures for financing that can enable developing countries to recover from the current recession and revive the prospects of achieving the SDGs.

In preparation for the annual Forum on Financing for Development next April, I intend to convene a few informal meetings and consultations to advance these objectives.

It is also essential to see the fulfillment of the pledge by the advanced countries of \$100 billion annually in climate action financing for the developing countries.

Sustainable Infrastructure

The Addis Ababa Action Plan indicates that investing in sustainable and resilient infrastructure – energy, transport, water and sanitation – is a prerequisite for achieving most of the development goals. As the 2016 report of the private Business and Sustainable Development Commission noted: “There is no single type of investment (more essential) for the achievement of the SDGs than infrastructure”. Up to 92 percent of SDG targets are influenced by infrastructure. It is estimated that to meet the infrastructure requirements of the developing countries an additional annual investment of \$ 1.5 trillion is needed.

To this end, we need to: expand the capacity and incentives of national and multilateral development banks, investor institutions, funds and businesses to provide long term infrastructure financing; expand capital markets in developing countries; support regional and cross border infrastructure initiatives; and utilize advances in IT and digital applications to accelerate investment in sustainable infrastructure.

Considerable work has been initiated, in public and private settings, to promote renewable energy investments in developing countries. Similar focused consideration is needed in the Transportation, Housing, Water and Sanitation sectors.

A lack of capacity to prepare feasible and bankable infrastructure projects and to execute and administer them is a major impediment to infrastructure development in developing countries. To this end, consideration should be given to the creation of an Infrastructure Project Preparation and Investment Centre (IPPIC) under the umbrella of the United Nations.

The Infrastructure Project Centre could incorporate a compendium of pre-screened and viable/bankable infrastructure projects in

developing countries; a data base of private and public companies which can execute infrastructure projects; a compendium of investors – PE, and Pension Funds, Sovereign Wealth Funds – with interest and experience in investing in infrastructure, and a “Fintech” mechanism to bring them all together.

Application of Science and Technology

If we are to “build back better” from the wreckage of the COVID crisis, and accelerate the realization of the SDGs and Climate goals, the application and absorption of new technologies in the development paradigm is indispensable; indeed, imperative. This will be possible only if access to advanced technologies – in all relevant spheres – is available to developing countries on preferential terms.

To this end, the Intellectual Property regime should be made compatible with the SDGs; commercial R&D should be accompanied by larger publicly-funded research; academic institutions must be free from the grip of industry and new technologies should be shaped towards realization of the SDGs. The UN’s Technology Facilitation Mechanism, the annual multi stakeholder STI Forum, and the UN’s Technology Bank can be utilized to promote practical applications of Science & Technology for SDG implementation.

As the scramble for a vaccine and treatment for COVID-19 has shown, if there is a sufficiently strong desire to achieve a specific scientific outcome, the resources required can be readily mobilized.

The digital revolution has led to the creation of enormous wealth in record time. But this is concentrated mainly in two countries. The digital revolution has opened vast opportunities for the developing countries to access knowledge and apply new technologies and adopt new production and consumption patterns that can enhance efficiency, productivity, employment and growth.

Indeed, with proper planning, developing countries can aspire, not so much to “catch up” with the current development models of the industrial countries, but to “leapfrog” into new and modern development paradigms utilizing digital and other cutting edge technologies such as: Artificial Intelligence, quantum computing, and robotics.

Yet, this endeavour will be still born if the yawning gap between the under-connected and the hyper-digitalized countries is not bridged; if

the conditions and terms in the digital space continue to be set by a handful of internet giants; and if, instead of closing the North-South gap, we create a West-East digital divide.

The UN Secretary-General's "Road Map for Digital Cooperation" shows a way forward. We must explore how to secure its realization.

ECOSOC process

As usual, this year ECOSOC has a long agenda which will be considered in the Plenary and the Management, Humanitarian, Operational Activities and Integration segments. I will rely greatly on the skill and expertise of the distinguished Vice Presidents to enable the Council to adequately consider all the issues on its extensive agenda.

I also intend to work closely with the President of the General Assembly for the 75th Session, H.E. Mr. Volkan Bozkir, in areas where the ECOSOC and the General Assembly exercise joint or common responsibilities.

Most of the issues on the Council's agenda are long standing and positions on these are well known. It would be more efficient therefore if the interventions and proposals from Members were focused on the important, new or outstanding issues, without recalling known history. It would be helpful also if proposals for decision similarly focused on such important, new or outstanding issues, while past provisions could be merely recalled in perambular provisions. If accepted, this approach may save considerable time which could be better utilized to address the multiple challenges we face today.

Pakistan will conduct the ECOSOC's proceedings with objectivity and impartiality but not without ambition- the ambition to promote the vital objectives of recovering from the COVID-19 crisis, achieving the SDGs during the decade of action and implementing the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

I thank you.