

A reinvigorated ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment

- Explanatory note -

1. Secretary-General's proposals

The breadth and depth of the 2030 Agenda requires greater strategic guidance *from*, and system-wide accountability *to*, Member States. The QCPR resolution stressed that the governance architecture of the UN development system (UNDS) must be able to enhance coordination, coherence, effectiveness and efficiency of operational activities for development (OP44) and the role of ECOSOC should be improved to provide overall guidance, particularly through its Segment on Operational Activities for Development. The Secretary-General, therefore, proposes to institutionalize the ECOSOC Segment as an accountability platform for system-wide performance in relation to the 2030 Agenda, and proposes to do so by convening biannual sessions with distinct, yet complementary focuses.

The **first session (OAS-I)** would focus on:

- (a) providing policy guidance on system-wide action at all levels, benefiting from independent system-wide evaluations and annual reporting on the system's collective support for the implementation of the SDGs.
- (b) exerting oversight on UNDS regional coordination through annual reporting on the outcome of newly synchronized regional coordination mechanisms of the UNDS and longer-term repositioning efforts.

The **second session (OAS-II)** would focus on:

- (a) providing guidance to the governing bodies of the UNDS to strengthen strategic direction and oversight by Member States across funds, programmes and specialized agencies to ensure a common approach to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- (b) Providing guidance on the development system's operational coordination with humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding efforts, leveraging a redesigned ECOSOC event on development and humanitarian collaboration, as well as the joint meeting of the Council and the Peacebuilding Commission, for comprehensive consideration and approach on these issues.

2. Rationale

The Secretary-General's proposal is based on the acknowledgement that the governance architecture of the development system, in its current form, is not geared to provide the level of oversight required to ensure more cohesive development system support for the implementation of the new 2030 Agenda. Analysis shows that UNDS governance is fragmented across individual governing bodies' areas of work, with limited interaction among those bodies and with the Economic and Social Council. The new agenda, on the other hand, requires a higher degree of integration across the three dimensions of development – not only in terms of support provided by the system, but also its interface with Member States.

The proposal by the Secretary-General aims to address these issues by creating space for more effective horizontal oversight and coordination, increased transparency, higher efficiency and more consistent engagement with Member States on the system's collective performance.

The Council already has a range of tools at its hands, including the Operational Activities Segment, the Humanitarian Affairs Segment, the event on transition from relief to development and the joint meeting of ECOSOC and the Peacebuilding Commission. Yet, in its current state, the Council does not utilize fully the potential of these segments and events to live up to the integrated nature of the 2030

Agenda. Overall, there is also a need to reinforce the Council's deliberative function, with an emphasis on accountability, knowledge-sharing and mutual learning for better results.

The PGA's process to align the work of the ECOSOC and the General Assembly with the 2030 Agenda, within the purview of the review mandated by GA resolution 68/1, is parallel and complementary to the repositioning of the ECOSOC OAS, mandated by QCPR resolution 71/243. The Secretary-General has advanced his proposal in response to such mandate and with the intent to maximize the role of the Operational Activities Segment to bring about more effective and efficient follow-up to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The added value of the Secretary-General's proposal consists in better focus, greater coherence across these activities, and better participation and outcome of the discussions required to guide and oversee the UNDS support to the 2030 Agenda

Currently, the focus of the OAS discussions is hampered by the limited time and the number of issues to cover in just three days. Two meetings with a clear focus would improve the quality of discussions and the OAS outcomes.

In addition, there is no time to give appropriate space to reporting by governing boards, and their issues are lost. Dedicated space for providing guidance to the governing boards of UNDS entities would ensure a stronger and better approach across issue areas for system-wide action in support of the 2030 Agenda.

Oversight over coherence and coordination at regional level is currently missing. Creating space in that regard would allow Member States to be informed through annual reporting on the outcome of newly synchronized regional coordination mechanisms of the UNDS and with a systematic opportunity to exercise their oversight role, including with respect to the system's reprofiling and restructuring of the regional architecture.

Consideration of synergies between development, humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts is currently disjointed and with little effective impact. Bringing together and improving the transition event on humanitarian relief to development and the ECOSOC-PBC event, would ensure comprehensive consideration and approach on synergies between development and humanitarian as well as peacebuilding activities, as mandated by the QCPR. By creating intergovernmental space within ECOSOC for a comprehensive discussion and guidance on synergies across development, humanitarian and peacebuilding activities, Member States can steer the system towards that end as they see fit and ensuring a more robust contribution by UNCTs to accelerate transitions out of crises into long-term development.

Better focus, greater thematic coherence and coherence across activities would result in better participation from capitals and participation by experts across different fields, including from humanitarian and peacebuilding areas, that would foster discussions and synergies across line ministries and issue areas, advancing the integrated approach called for in the 2030 Agenda.

3. Implementing the Secretary-General's proposals

The Secretary-General's proposal to strengthen the ECOSOC OAS through the establishment of two biannual meetings could be implemented by institutionalizing OAS-I and OAS-II for the duration of two days each:

- The first session (OAS-I) could continue to be held in the first quarter of the year, as per current practice.

- The second session (OAS-II) could be held back to back with the Council’s humanitarian affairs segment. It could also be held in close proximity to the sessions of the entities governing bodies, or back to back with the proposed Joint Board of NY-based funds and programmes. This would maximize coherence, efficiencies and participation in the session.

The Secretary-General’s proposal would neither shorten nor add layers to the existing arrangements. With the current OAS duration at three days, the Secretary-General’s proposal would mean that only one additional day would be added to the overall Segment during the year – yet an addition that, overall, would allow for better focus, greater thematic coherence, better participation, and stronger synergies across activities, while also ensuring space to ensure oversight and accountability for the repositioning of the UN development system.

While exact estimates and precise quantification on resource implications can be made upon decision of the General Assembly to proceed with institutional changes, therefore requesting a PBI, the costs of adding one additional day to the ECOSOC OAS can be expected to be minimal and outweighed by the gains in effectiveness and impact of the Segment.

The outcome of the sessions could be a resolution or a Chair’s summary, depending on the theme.

Ultimately, the reform of intergovernmental bodies is the strict prerogative of the Member States. Focus, timing, outcome and other relevant matters are for decision by Member States. They may decide for example to consider the Secretary-General proposals in conjunction – or in parallel – to other existing processes to reform the ECOSOC and realign it to the 2030 Agenda. The Secretary-General’s proposal is meant to provide input, as Member States seize the opportunity to reposition governance structures to ensure strategic direction, oversight, transparency and accountability of the UN development system to deliver on the ambition of the 2030 Agenda.