

**Remarks for the Joint briefing of the President of the General
Assembly and President of ECOSOC**
20 January 2022 at 3 pm

**Mr. President of the General Assembly,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,**

I would like to start by thanking the President of the General Assembly for his kind words and insights about the work ahead of us this year, and how we are joining hands in delivering it.

I would also like to wish you all, belatedly, a very happy New Year!

We all hope that 2022 will be the year when we overcome the COVID-19 pandemic. The year when we embark with renewed energy in realizing the world we outlined in the 2030 Agenda, building on the lessons from this terrible crisis and our responses.

As much as we need to remain optimistic, we also need to deal with today's challenges seriously and swiftly. We have seen, not least with the outbreak of the Omicron variant, that equal access to the COVID-19 vaccine is essential for recovering better. Until the world's population is vaccinated, no society, no human being will be able to enjoy a "normal life". Our recovery will be fragile and uneven. The response to the Omicron crisis has also shed new light on the "glass ceiling" for international cooperation. Frontiers closed. Affected countries were isolated. In order to recover together and transform our world, we need an upsurge of global solidarity and multilateralism.

Together, we need to crush the soaring inequalities between the poorest and the wealthier countries. All were affected by the pandemic. But minuscule portions of the population are vaccinated in many LDCs. Developing countries' narrow fiscal space constrain recovery packages.

We have seen important manifestations of solidarity. But this is far from enough. Priorities include ensuring equal access to the vaccine and financial resources for recovery, strengthening health and social protection systems, ensuring climate justice, and building resilience to future pandemics especially for the most

vulnerable countries, societies and people. Closing inequalities between the haves and the have nots is a moral imperative.

We, at the United Nations, are uniquely placed to make this happen. We represent all peoples of this world. We must stand for their well-being, and relaunch momentum to realize the SDGs.

For this to happen, we must utilize the full strength of the General Assembly, ECOSOC and the **High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development** – the HLPF. We must maximize their role to identify policy solutions, empower them to act and take implementation of their decisions seriously. They must reinforce one another.

I am therefore delighted to inform that the President of the General Assembly and I are cooperating closely to ensure that this happens. This is what we want to talk about today.

Priorities

When I took office last July, I outlined a number of priorities for my Presidency. They are closely aligned with those of the PGA, and reinforce each other. They help guide the work of ECOSOC and its cooperation with the General Assembly.

My first priority is ensuring that ECOSOC rises to the occasion

ECOSOC supports multiple aspects of the response to COVID-19 and the pursuit of the SDGs. I am working with the Bureau to strengthen ECOSOC, by implementing the GA decisions from last June on strengthening the Council and the HLPF (see GA/RES/75/290, A and B).

In two weeks in February, we will hold the new **Coordination Segment** and the strengthened **Partnership Forum**. Holding these events early in the year will guide and inspire the work of ECOSOC and its functional commissions and subsidiary bodies, leading up to the HLPF in July. The Partnership Forum will further reinforce the engagement of stakeholders in the work of the UN on shaping a better recovery. A strengthened, and more inclusive ECOSOC and HLPF, will better complement and bolster the work of the General Assembly.

Second, dealing with the impacts of COVID-19 and a sustainable recovery

In order to build back better, we need to ensure that developing countries in particular have access to the resources they need for their COVID-19 response and recovery and implementing measures that also support the SDGs. The joint meeting on **Debt Sustainability**, that the President of the General Assembly spoke about, will definitely advance this objective. It will promote more ambitious

and structural measures to address the debt overhang. It will build on the outcome of the **Financing for Development Forum (FfD Forum)**.

We have seen during this pandemic the importance of science and technology, including digital technology. ECOSOC **Multistakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation (STI Forum)** in May will discuss new approaches to ensure equal access by developing countries, building on the Second Committee's guidance.

Some groups of countries need our dedicated attention. ECOSOC and I personally have been actively engaged in the preparations for the now postponed LDC-5. I, however, hope it will be held as soon as possible. The HLPF in July can boost implementation and promote strong synergies with the 2030 Agenda.

I am also actively involved in the PGA's Board of Advisers for Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). ECOSOC plays an important role to ensure concerted UN system support to LDCs, SIDS, and other countries in special situations.

Africa is the furthest behind in the vaccine rollout. This compounds poverty, conflicts, other diseases and the impacts of the climate crisis such as drought. Mindful that the General Assembly has repeatedly reaffirmed the **Development of Africa** as an established priority of the United Nations, I, together with the President of the General Assembly, are planning a joint High-Level Meeting to reconfirm this important priority in the context of COVID-19. It will also feed into the great vision for COP-27 on climate, to be hosted by a sisterly African country - Egypt.

As I indicated in my inaugural statement last July, we must decisively address inequalities in all dimensions, within and between countries. I therefore plan to convene a **Special Meeting of ECOSOC on how COVID-19 recovery measures are impacting on inequalities**, in particular inequalities based on race.

The 2021 ECOSOC Special Meeting on "Reimagining Equality" highlighted that discrimination and racism is not only perpetrated by individuals or single groups, but is embedded into the very fabric of various social, financial, and political institutions.

This meeting would reiterate that the 2030 Agenda must remain our blueprint to build forward a more inclusive, sustainable, just, and resilient future for all, leaving no one behind.

Third, Partnerships, Inclusivity and Youth Engagement.

I welcome the PGA's emphasis on youth empowerment and the Youth Fellows program. It resonates very well with the upcoming ECOSOC **Youth Forum** on an SDG-guided recovery. The Youth Forum, in April, allows youth to contribute to the dialogue and engage with Member States on the work of the United Nations on youth priorities.

I believe the outcomes of the Forum could contribute not only to the HLPF, but also to the Education Summit proposed by the Secretary-General in his report on Our Common Agenda.

Fourth, Strengthening the work of ECOSOC on peacebuilding

The General Assembly, in its June decisions on strengthening ECOSOC, also stressed the Council's role in assisting countries emerging from conflict to return onto the road to long-term sustainable development. I am supporting the strengthening cooperation between ECOSOC and the Peacebuilding Commission, including ongoing process to designate an Informal Coordinator for the two bodies.

ECOSOC meeting on **Transition from Relief to Development** should also ensure more integration between UN system humanitarian and development activities and the system's support to peaceful societies.

My fifth -and related-priority is ensuring continuing oversight of UN system

ECOSOC's Charter role to coordinate the UN system is critical to provide integrated support to the 2030 Agenda, as an integral part of the response to COVID-19. I am working closely with the Vice-President/Finland to strengthen ECOSOC's oversight of the implementation of the General Assembly resolution on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of UN system operational activities (QCPR).

This will also support the Second Committee's deliberations on operational activities. On another note, the Vice-President/Bulgaria is coordinating the review of the work of the subsidiary bodies mandated by the General Assembly in June. This will reinforce the work of the Coordination Segment.

Sixth, the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and ECOSOC High-Level Segment

The work of the HLPF in July is essential. It will discuss ways to launch accelerated SDG progress, as part of a sustainable recovery. It will build on the experiences of the 45 VNRs presenting countries and inputs from intergovernmental bodies across the system, to recommend innovative policies. Its review of SDG 14 and 15, in particular, can strengthen action around climate, oceans and biodiversity,

feeding into the President of General Assembly's planned high-level on "Moment for Nature".

I take this opportunity to urge all of you to work closely with the soon to be announced Co-Facilitators, towards a consensus-based HLPF Ministerial Declaration.

The High-level segment of ECOSOC will address the shortcomings in multilateral cooperation that were revealed by the response to COVID-19, and efforts to ensure equitable access to the vaccine. It will build on the upcoming meeting of the PGA on access to the vaccine.

Coherence and coordination of the work of the GA and ECOSOC

GA and ECOSOC meetings also reinforce each other in many other ways. For example, based on exchanges of views involving the PGA and UN-Habitat, the planned ECOSOC meeting on the implementation of the **New Urban Agenda** will complement the General Assembly's High-Level Meeting on this topic on 28 April.

It would be recalled that the report of the Secretary-General is mandated to go to the General Assembly through ECOSOC. ECOSOC will utilize this meeting to focus more particularly on whether the implementation of the New Urban Agenda is addressing inequalities, including issues related to slums, and on the UN system strategy for supporting the implementation of the Agenda.

Secretary-General report on Our Common Agenda (OCA)

I commend the leadership of the President of the General Assembly in proactively taking forward consultations on **Our Common Agenda** report. I look forward to the series of consultations announced by PGA, as many recommendations in the report are directly linked to the work of ECOSOC. This includes the Biennial Summit between the G20, ECOSOC, the Secretary-General and the international financial institutions.

It will be important to ensure complementarity between the proposed new summits and the mandated General Assembly, ECOSOC and HLPF meetings, such as the 2023 SDG Summit and the Summit of the Future that same year.

Business continuity

The United Nations must continue to work regardless of the present circumstances, while taking appropriate measures to ensure the safety of all participants and staff. I have provided guidance to the subsidiary bodies of ECOSOC that are starting their meetings very soon, which was also shared with all of you.

I requested the Chairs of the subsidiary bodies to be flexible in organizing their programme of work, taking into account the health situation and the recommendations of the Secretariat.

I am hoping that, as the situation evolves, we would be able to convene hybrid meetings later in the year. In order to ensure a common and coordinated approach, ECOSOC will also closely follow the lead of the General Assembly on business continuity, as in the past. As on other issues, I will work closely with the President of the General Assembly.

Let me conclude by reassuring, once again, that we are both determined to work closely together on all priority issues to ensure strong impact of the work of our Charter-based Principal Organs on the lives of the people we serve.

I thank you for your kind attention and I look forward to hearing your comments, views and insights.