

13th Session of the Committee for Development Policy

Statement by Mr. Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Secretary-General for UN Conference on Sustainable Development

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Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the 13th session of the Committee for Development Policy. And thank you for your dedication to ECOSOC's work.

I am confident that your work will provide insightful and practical recommendations for Member States and the international community at large.

The global economic crisis caused significant setbacks in reaching the Millennium Development Goals. Despite early signs of recovery, the fallout will continue to have adverse impacts on social development. Malnutrition, already on the rise prior to the crisis, remains a grave threat to human well-being.

There continues to be downward pressure on informal sector wages, resulting in the rise of the working poor.

This fragile situation highlights the significant challenges facing the world's poor. It also reminds us of our commitment to them. Today, we will be discussing many critical issues and I would like to make comments about four of them on your agenda.

First, let me address education. Despite progress in many areas, according to the latest MDG Report, the pace is insufficient to ensure that all girls and boys complete primary schooling by the target year 2015.

Resources are needed to ensure that there are enough qualified and trained teachers, as well as classrooms with adequate facilities. The economic crisis has made it difficult for donor countries to fulfill their commitments in this sector.

Achieving education for all must be a priority. Equally important, the overall quality of education needs to be improved, and attuned to national priorities. This includes higher education. Skill development, which connects education and skill training to the workplace, also needs to be strengthened.

Your insights in this area will be a positive and much needed contribution to this year's Annual Ministerial Review.

Next, I would like to discuss the upcoming 4th UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries.

This year's conference will take place during a difficult period. The economic downturn is not the only challenge LDCs face. Your report last year to ECOSOC noted a number of others: the food crisis, climate change, natural disasters, conflicts and social unrest.

Despite, or rather, because of these difficulties, the least developed countries have high expectations about the outcome of the Conference.

However, past programmes of action have not been entirely effective. So far, only a few countries have graduated from the list. The gap between LDCs and other developing countries remains wide. In some instances it is getting even wider.

We must devise a more effective development strategy, supported by a fully engaged international community, to meet the high expectations of LDCs.

This Committee has already made important contributions to the Conference. But additional insights are necessary to create a programme of action that will help LDCs achieve their goals, and assist them in graduating from the list of least developed countries.

Now let me turn to migration, which has an important function in many societies. This includes remittances, vital labour market needs, and the creation of businesses and jobs from skills acquired abroad.

However, migration can also cause social tensions, especially during economic slowdowns when jobs are scarce. Furthermore, in countries of origin, emigration may lead to the disintegration of families, and to the loss of skilled professionals, in particular health workers and teachers.

The economic crisis has led to a fall in remittances in some key migration corridors. Many developed countries have tightened immigration controls.

Fortunately, no mass returns of international migrants have taken place. Long-term economic and demographic trends suggest that the need for migrant labour will only increase in the years to come.

Migration is a complex issue. I hope that your insights will help us formulate policy recommendations that maximize the benefits of international migration for countries of destination, countries of origin and migrants alike.

Fourthly, let me mention efforts to advance the UN's development agenda beyond 2015.

In the Outcome Document of the 2010 MDG Summit, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to recommend steps for exactly this purpose.

These recommendations will be included in a new report from the Secretary-General for the 66th session, and all subsequent sessions until 2015.

This report will be supplemented by the annual Millennium Development Goals Report and the Report of the MDG Gap Task Force.

I have asked Mr. Vos to coordinate its preparation, in collaboration with our partners in the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs (ECESA).

I have also asked ECESA to think about a system-wide framework for the UN development agenda beyond 2015.

NGOs, academic groups and others have already started discussions on what the new global framework might look like. There are questions about ownership and accountability regarding the MDGs. There are concerns about insufficient attention to inclusive growth, and the specific challenges faced by conflict-affected countries.

New issues have also been raised, such as the need for climate-resilient development and vulnerability brought about by the rising food and energy prices.

I hope that this Committee will fully engage in these debates, inside and outside the UN.

What are your views on a broader framework? And how could that framework address the complex challenges of sustainable development, with its economic, social and environmental dimensions?

In this sense, I also expect the Rio+20 process to make a major contribution to work on a post-2015 development framework. Rio+20 can be captured by one focused political document, two themes – a green economy and institutional framework for sustainable development, and three objectives – renew political commitments, assess progress and gaps in implementation and identify new and emerging challenges.

I look forward to your insights on these critical fronts.

Madame Chair,

You and your colleagues have a full agenda. I count on your expert knowledge and wisdom during these proceedings. Let us work together to make ECOSOC more effective and relevant in alleviating the heavy burden of poverty many around the world know all too well.

I wish you every success in your deliberations.

Thank you.

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