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Introductory remarks by

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“The role of the United Nations system in implementing the Ministerial Declaration of the high-level segment of the 2007 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council”

I have the pleasure of introducing the report of the Secretary-General (E/2008/21) on the theme of the 2008 coordination segment.

The theme follows-up on the 2007 Ministerial Declaration on “Strengthening the efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger, including through the global partnership for development”. The segment provides an excellent opportunity for the Council to impart substantive guidance on how to strengthen the UN system approach for providing support for achieving MDG-1.

The review of how the UN system is supporting implementation of the MDGs will be an important contribution to the high-level events in the General Assembly in the fall this year.

Considerable progress has been made in recent years at the inter-governmental level to understand and recognize the impact of different policy sectors on eradicating poverty and hunger. While recognizing this progress, the 2007 Ministerial Declaration underscored the multidimensional nature of the challenge to eradicate poverty and hunger and the need to tackle this challenge from a broader development perspective.

Clearly, the message from the Declaration is that action should be sought in a broad range of policy areas within the efforts to ensure education for all, the promotion of gender equality and the strengthening of the global partnership for development. These areas should be treated as integral elements of comprehensive, pro-poor national development strategies and a framework for action for all development partners, including the UN system.

The Secretary-General’s Report focuses on the role of the UN system in supporting this approach. I would like to highlight some of the issues and conclusions addressed by the report.

Eradication of poverty and hunger continues to be the core objective of the United Nations development agenda. The UN system’s approach to supporting the achievement of this goal has evolved along with the evolution of the discourse on this issue at the intergovernmental level. As a result, MDG-1 is not only the objective of targeted UN system activities, but also the goal of a broad range of policy areas, such as rural and agricultural development; employment

creation; sustainable development; science and technology; trade; and financing for development.

On rural and agricultural development, the work of the UN system addresses a broad range of issues concerned with short- and long-term needs and spans across a broad range of UN system programmes and activities. For example, the “twin-track” approach adopted by the Rome-based agencies includes both immediate interventions to alleviate hunger and longer-term programmes to increase agricultural productivity, improve natural resources management, infrastructure and adaptation to climate change, addressing the root causes of hunger.

In response to the unfolding global food crisis, the Secretary-General has recently established a High-Level Task Force to promote a unified response by the UN system. The Comprehensive Framework for Action put forward by the Task Force identifies actions to be taken urgently to meet immediate needs and to contribute to sustainable food security. The challenge now is to ensure their implementation, including identifying the levels and sources of funding needed in the short and medium term.

In the area of full employment and decent work, the UN system recently has made considerable efforts to place employment at the centre of its support to poverty eradication and hunger and to facilitate the integration of this objective in the UN system activities. Since the 2006 ECOSOC Ministerial Declaration on employment, several collaborative initiatives have been launched, including the adoption of a Toolkit by the UN system Chief Executives Board (CEB) to help the UN system to mainstream full employment and decent work in their policies, programmes and activities.

On trade, the UN system approach towards the Doha Development Round has been to advocate against premature trade liberalization that would hurt the most vulnerable groups of society. The UN system has consistently promoted the idea that trade liberalization should be accompanied by other policies aimed at strengthening the productive sectors of countries at early stages of development. The Accra Accord, concluding UNCTAD-XII last April, highlighted the challenges facing many developing countries as they strive to integrate successfully into the international economic and financial system and set out a detailed agenda for progress in economic and social development spanning areas ranging from commodities, trade and debt to investment and new technologies. In a complementary fashion, UN support to the Aid for Trade initiative has focused on generating supply-side responses aimed at building developing countries’ capacity to use trade to expand economic growth and employment opportunities, including through innovation, networking and knowledge management.

Despite this progress, more efforts are needed to integrate important dimensions such as sustainable development, science and technology, and financing for development in the UN system approach to support the eradication of poverty and hunger.

On sustainable development, there is a need to reinforce the link between UN system interventions aiming at eradicating poverty and hunger and those aiming at promoting sustainable patterns of production and consumption, and fostering sustainable use and management of natural resources. This was underscored during the recent 16th session of the

Commission on Sustainable Development, focused on agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa.

Similarly, a more comprehensive approach is needed to fully exploit potential of science and technology for addressing all dimensions of poverty and hunger, including emerging challenges such as climate change, biofuels and crop varieties.

On financing for development, the UN system has made important progress in strengthening developing countries capacity to assess their resources needs, attract and manage international resources, and generate and effectively use domestic resources to finance poverty reduction strategies. The system, however, could devote more attention and capacity, and play a bigger role, in helping developing countries identify and address sectoral imbalances in their resource allocation and investment decisions.

A number of processes underway are expected to further advance the financing for development agenda and promote greater coordination of UN system efforts in its support, from the Development Cooperation Forum held earlier this week to the Doha Review Conference at the end of this year.

The UN Secretary-General has placed greater emphasis on measuring results, and strengthening accountability for implementation, as both are key to the realization of the MDGs. He has also been making a concerted effort to sharpen the focus on Africa's development. In this context, he has launched two important initiatives: the UN MDG Gap Task Force, to monitor progress in the global partnerships for development; and the MDG Africa Steering Group, which aims to help accelerate progress towards the MDGs in the region. Both will provide important inputs to the High-level Event on the MDGs – to be convened in September by the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly – bringing together world leaders, civil society and the private sector to identify key gaps in implementation and spur concrete efforts, resources and mechanisms to bridge them.

The report before you presents a number of recommendations where UN initiatives need to be strengthened and scaled up to promote more comprehensive approaches to the eradication of poverty and hunger and greater coherence and effectiveness of UN system support. I hope that these recommendations will facilitate your deliberations during the segment and contribute to its successful outcome.

Thank you.