



Draft Opening Statement ECOSOC Vice President

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Annual Ministerial Review Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Preparatory Meeting

Montevideo, Uruguay
27 April 2012

Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning and thank you for attending this Regional Preparatory Meeting of the Economic and Social Council in preparation for the Annual Ministerial Review in July. I am pleased, on behalf of His Excellency Mr. Miloš Koterec, President of ECOSOC, to welcome you to this important conference.

At the outset, I wish to thank our hosts, the Government of Uruguay, for their generous hospitality, as well as the people of the city of Montevideo for their warm welcome. I also heartily thank our partners, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) for their support in convening this important dialogue. I especially thank you — honourable Ministers and other distinguished delegates — for taking the time to participate in spite of your busy schedules.

Distinguished guests,

For over 60 years, ECOSOC has served as the principal global forum where nations assemble to collectively address global development challenges. Its strength has always been its broad representation — a place for countries large and small alike to voice their concerns and seek solutions to common global problems.

Since 2007, ECOSOC's substantive session has featured the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR), drawing high-level policymakers from governments and civil society, to discuss and review progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. This year's ministerial review focuses on the theme of "Promoting productive capacity, employment and decent work to eradicate poverty in the context of inclusive, sustainable and equitable economic growth at all levels for achieving the Millennium Development Goals." A topic of vital importance tackled at a timely moment.

At the country level, the primary focus of the AMR is the National Voluntary Presentations, in which broad-based national consultations are held to analyze progress towards the achievement of national development objectives. This year, nine countries are participating in the process. Two Latin American countries, Brazil and Ecuador, will discuss their progress with respect to promoting economic growth, employment and decent work. We commend them for undertaking this effort.

Today's meeting marks an important milestone in the regional consultations. It comes on the heels of two other regional meetings: the first held in Japan, the second in Ethiopia. It will be followed by a fourth and final meeting next month in Doha, Qatar.

Our deliberations today will culminate in the global level meeting to take place in July, during the ECOSOC substantive session in New York. There, high-level representatives will consider the outcomes of the national and regional level reviews. An assessment of the overall situation on the theme of employment and decent work will be made in order to propose concrete global actions and potential solutions. The analysis and insights which emerge from today's important meeting will help ensure that global policy-makers are better aware of the priorities of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Increasingly, ECOSOC must become the destination for governments to discuss and solve not only global economic problems, but also social and environmental ones.

Building stronger partnerships with the private sector, civil society, the academia, philanthropic organizations and other stakeholders, can only but reinforce ECOSOC's role in tackling these interlinked issues.

Dear Colleagues,

Latin America and the Caribbean have a lot to be proud of on the theme of economic development. The region has fared relatively well in the recent financial crisis, and many countries have endeavoured to address the structural factors impeding development by incorporating many of the internationally agreed goals into their economic strategies.

Countries in the region have combined social programmes with proactive strategies to expand and diversify production. This in many cases has been supported by macroeconomic policies that fostered structural change, investment, and job creation. Such policies include reducing capital flows and exchange rate volatility; providing inclusive access to finance; and absorbing business cycle fluctuations.

This region, therefore, has a lot to share with the rest of the world at the ECOSOC High Level event in New York. Your success stories, as well as the accounts of challenges encountered, will contribute greatly to the global debate and search for solutions.

Many similar challenges are faced by other regions of the world. The recent economic slowdown has exacerbated an existing global decent work deficit. In all regions, the crisis produced a marked slowdown in the pace of employment growth as a consequence of the decline in aggregate demand. Worldwide, labour productivity growth decelerated in 2008-2011 relative to the average for 2002-2007, and this slow pace of labour productivity is of special concern.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The theme of labour markets and social protection is of great importance. In Latin America, approximately 80% of household income comes from wages, meaning that labour markets are a key link between external shocks and households. It also means that social protection policies designed to improve labour markets and incomes for vulnerable families can have significant effects, and could potentially entail large costs.

We will examine how to reduce exclusion through improvements in productivity of employment and social safety networks. What, for example, could be done to reduce income gaps between workers that are explained by the differential in labour productivity? How could safety networks help reduce vulnerability and unemployment?

We will also focus on youth and decent work. The promotion of decent work for youth is a key task in regional development efforts. Young people are disproportionately affected by unemployment and overrepresented in the informal sector and among the working poor. In addition, many countries have witnessed a surge in the number of discouraged young workers, who are not counted among the unemployed because they are not actively seeking employment. Youth unemployment, underemployment and vulnerable employment also have high social costs, particularly in terms of loss of human and productive potential, increased welfare payments and decreased fiscal revenues. We will examine, for example, what youth oriented programmes have been implemented successfully and how can youth engage in social dialogue with governments, private sector, and labour organizations.

We will also have the opportunity to debate and share experiences on national efforts to foster productivity, create jobs, and establish social protection floors.

We hope that this meeting will generate key policy messages for the Annual Ministerial Review. Our challenge is to craft and promote such messages for maximum effect.

I invite you to participate actively in the meeting and to share your expertise, especially in the debate sessions this evening.

Let us talk about effective employment policies. And let us be candid in our conversations about the challenges we face, the policies we know that work, and about the things we know do not work.

I thank you.