

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**OPENING STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF ECOSOC,
H. E. AMBASSADOR DALIUS ČEKUOLIS,
AT THE ORGANISATIONAL SESSION OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
17 JANUARY 2007**

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to serve as the President of the Economic and Social Council this year, which could be a landmark year in defining a new course for the work of the Council. I wish to extend my sincere gratitude to the members of this Council for placing their confidence in me. I will do my utmost to fulfill this challenging task.

It is an honour for my country – Lithuania – which recently marked the 15th anniversary of her UN membership. In these fifteen years Lithuania went through a dramatic process of transition, making enormous efforts and sacrifices in order to complete political, economic, social reforms. In this process we have come to appreciate both the importance of national ownership and, also solidarity and assistance of the international community at all levels. This experience will be a constant source of inspiration for my work serving the Council.

Let me welcome the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon among us. His presence here is a testimony to his commitment to the cause of development and the importance he attaches to the

work of ECOSOC. I am sure that I can count on his personal support for our endeavours to make ECOSOC truly a parliament of development.

My sincere thanks go to Ambassador Ali Hachani for his able leadership and valuable contribution to the work of the Council during the past year. He has made my task easier by laying foundation for implementing the decisions of the 2005 World Summit. I would also like to thank my colleagues, Ambassador Leo Merores from Haiti, Ambassador Prasad Kariyawasam from Sri Lanka and Ambassador Hjálmar Hannesson from Iceland, for their excellent work as members of the Bureau. I would also like to thank the Secretariat, particularly the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, for its professional and valuable support to the work of the Bureau and the Council.

Congratulations are due to the new members of the Bureau on their election. I look forward to working with them during this demanding and exciting year for the Council.

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

The international community has witnessed significant steps in the efforts to improve the plight of the poor of this world. True to its Charter, the United Nations has played a central role in the efforts to “promote higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development.” It has brought the whole world around a set of agreed goals and targets that are essential for eradicating the menaces of poverty and hunger from the face of this earth. Thanks to these efforts, considerable progress has been made over the last several years.

The proportion of people living in extreme poverty has decreased from 28 per cent to 19 per cent between 1990 and 2002. Achieving universal primary education is within sight and more children are surviving the first years of their lives. Several countries are succeeding in reducing

HIV infection rates and more funds are flowing into the fight against malaria. The plight of the weak and vulnerable has attracted attention from all over the world. Yet, we are far from achieving our goals. Our progress is uneven. The benefits and burdens are not shared equally or fairly.

The progress in poverty reduction owes much to the achievements in East and Southeast Asia, while progress in other regions is lagging much behind. Rural children, especially girls, are less likely to attend school. Although some countries are succeeding in reducing HIV infection rates, the overall rates continue to increase and the number of people living with HIV is on the rise. This epidemic remains to be centred in sub-Saharan Africa, where many other challenges remain and need to be addressed urgently.

Each country has primary responsibility for its own development. However, these national efforts should be complemented by relevant global policies and programmes. This spirit of cooperation for achieving the development goals is very well captured in the global partnership for development. I believe that Economic and Social Council has an instrumental role in making this partnership work.

The varieties of functions, both old and new, that the Council performs are at the foundation of this partnership.

Firstly, the Council's special high-level meeting with the Bretton Woods Institutions, the World Trade Organisation and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. This meeting is founded on the central function of promoting coordination, coherence and consistency in the trade, aid and development policies. I believe that we need to fully utilize the potential of this meeting in delivering results. I intend to build on the past initiatives in making this meeting more engaging and productive.

Secondly, the Council has been mandated to assess the implementation of the UN development agenda, which emerged from UN conferences and summits held since 1990s. The Annual Ministerial Reviews (AMR) will provide an authoritative assessment on progress made to date at the global, regional and national levels and lack thereof. With the participation of the ministers and the high-level policy makers, the Council will make recommendations on concrete steps to overcome the obstacles and challenges faced in implementation. Through such recommendations, the AMR session should promote scaling-up and accelerate the implementation.

Thirdly, the Council is a natural platform for connecting the normative and operational work as well as engaging broad range of actors that have emerged on the international development cooperation scene. The Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) offers, for the first time, a platform for all the relevant actors on international development cooperation to engage in a dialogue on key policy issues that affect the quality and impact of development aid. DCF will bring together both developed and developing country partners as well as bilateral development agencies. This new mandate provides the Council with a unique opportunity to promote enhanced coordination and facilitate greater development impact of international development cooperation.

Fourthly, ECOSOC remains as the hub for system-wide coordination. This role is also important for ensuring that the decisions of the Council are implemented throughout the system. Coordination segment of the Council provides a platform for guiding the UN system on these issues. This year we will build on the success of the last year's high level segment by addressing the theme of "Role of the UN system in promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all" at the coordination segment.

The coordination of the United Nations system on economic, social and related work is, of course, the role that the Council plays as the principal body. There is a room to improve the functioning of this role. This has also been acknowledged by the High-Level Panel on System-

wide Coherence, commissioned by the former Secretary-General. In addition to coordinating specialized agencies, the Council has an important role to coordinate its own functional commissions. We have made the first attempt in meeting with the chairpersons of the functional commissions all together just two days ago and we held a very productive meeting. I will make my utmost efforts to keep the communication open with these key bodies so that we could organize our work more effectively.

Fifthly, the General Assembly has acknowledged the Council's work in the area of post-conflict peacebuilding, in particular the success of the ad hoc advisory groups on countries emerging from conflict. I will try to build further on this important work and make sure that relevant ECOSOC's experience is of maximum benefit for the Peacebuilding Commission.

Finally, the Council provides a venue for connecting with people and promoting open discussion with broad participation from all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, private sector representatives and academia. Yet I feel that there is still a lot that we can and should do to engage these actors in our work. With the help of the members of the Council, I would like to explore possibilities for further interaction with the representatives of NGOs, civil society, private sector and academia.

Excellencies and distinguished delegates,

I would now like to turn to some urgent housekeeping issues. July is fast approaching and we have a busy year ahead of us. Let me now share with you what the remaining tasks are in preparing for the first Annual Ministerial Review and the biennial Development Cooperation Forum. With regard to the Development Cooperation Forum, the General Assembly has given us sufficient guidance. As for the annual ministerial-level review, the Council needs to decide on the theme for this year immediately and the multi-year programme of work, covering several years, in the near future.

We have a very busy year ahead of us. I think I warned you well enough. We really need to get started with the preparations immediately.

Let us work together to the common objective of making the Council work more effectively and efficiently. Let us work for the improvement of the lives of millions of people that our in dire need. Let's join hands in making this world a better world for each and every inhabitant of this planet. A truly prosperous and sustainable world.

I look forward to working with the members of the Council and its Bureau on these tasks.

Thank you.