



**The President
of the
Economic and Social Council**

**STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL**

H.E. MR. HAMIDON ALI

(Malaysia)

AT THE

ORGANIZATIONAL SESSION OF ECOSOC

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**Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great honour for my country and for me personally, to serve as the President of the Economic and Social Council. I would like to thank the members of the Council for reposing their confidence in me and electing me to this important office. I will spare no effort to live up to your expectations.

I would like to thank Ambassador Lucas for her remarkable leadership and contributions to the work of the Council during the past year. She has set very high standards, which I hope to emulate. I would also like to recognize and thank the other members of the Bureau, Ambassador Carmen Maria Gallardo Hernandez from El Salvador, Ambassador Tiina Intelmann from Estonia and Ambassador Somduth Soborun from Mauritius.

I pledge the strong support of ECOSOC to Haiti and its people who have been pummelled by a series of crises, the most recent being the devastating earthquake, which hit the country about a week ago. The government has expectations of ECOSOC, through the Ad Hoc Advisory Group and one of our first tasks is to see how the Council can support Haiti in this hour of need.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I must begin by being frank – ECOSOC must continuously prove its worth or be consigned to irrelevance. Efforts to reform, strengthen and rejuvenate ECOSOC have been altogether too frequent, reflecting not only changes in the international scenario, but more fundamentally, a profound dissatisfaction with the inability of ECOSOC to fulfil its Charter-mandated functions, as well as the desire of the international community to make ECOSOC 'fit for purpose'. Resolutions 45/264, 46/235, 48/162, 50/227 are testament of this.

Like many of you, however, I believe that the latest effort in this regard, namely General Assembly resolution 61/16, has, since its adoption, proven that it is a sound basis for making ECOSOC 'fit for purpose'. We have seen progress, but more needs to be done.

While resolution 61/16 is the system, or the 'hardware' for strengthening ECOSOC, I believe that we need to do more to strengthen the 'software'. The software that I refer to relates to issues that cannot be mandated on. It relates to our national and personal attitudes towards ECOSOC, how we interact with each other, ECOSOC's culture and ethic, as well as the relations between ECOSOC and other bodies which it comes into contact with – not only funds and programmes, the Bretton Woods Institutions, but also civil society, business and others.

Without making changes to the software, we can continue to tinker with the hardware all we want, but the results will be the same.

What changes should we make? My own views are encapsulated in what I call the five 'musts':

We must adopt a proactive and constructive agenda. We ought not to confuse activity with results and avoid what has been called 'The Do Something Fallacy', namely, we must do something – this is something - we must do it. Our actions must be purposeful;

We must adopt shorter, more focused agreements and resolutions. Instead of an avalanche of words which bury us all, we must have a flood of results. We must be less wedded to the sanctity of agreed language. The Ministerial Declaration on the theme of the AMR is a test for us in this regard;

We must do more to improve the atmospherics surrounding the ECOSOC. In my own experience, the issues which divide us are less than our common interests. At the

same time, I firmly believe that many of the arguments across the political divide are compelling. Equally important, I believe that compromise solutions can be found. However, we tend to lose focus of these facts since we all too often credit those across the political divide with a higher level of evil intentions and talent for subterfuge. To improve this, we need to promote greater transparency and honest dialogue, so concerns are clearly understood;

We must move beyond stale arguments. I accept that there continues to be profound differences on the role of the UN system in development issues and international economic governance in particular. One view asserts that the UN system is at the apex, overseeing the work of other entities. The other view asserts that the UN system while a significant actor, is one out of many. There are merits to both views. But not all issues are necessarily manifestations of this principle. Let us look at technical solutions to issues, instead of viewing them as issues reflecting political principles, from which there can be no compromise;

We must do justice to the ECOSOC's role in the operational aspects of the UN's work. For example, it is disheartening to see that our engagement with the CEB under the operational activities segment takes up slightly more than an hour. In terms of our relations with the BWIs, we must engage them more meaningfully on their operational work, while continuing our discussions on issues such as voice and participation.

I will refrain from using the phrase 'no more business as usual', since saying it is now usual business – but things must change.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have several important challenges ahead of us. I view them as opportunities to capitalize on well-established functions of the ECOSOC to create new momentum to advance development.

One such event is the upcoming General Assembly High-Level Plenary Meeting this September. The General Assembly resolution calls on ECOSOC to assist in the process. We will not be found wanting.

Another important challenge the continued strengthening of the Council's role for coordination, policy review, dialogue and recommendations on all economic and social development issues. The Council must play a critical role in coordinating the United Nations development system's response to the global financial crisis – in accordance with the “Outcome of the Conference on the World Financial Crisis and Its Impact on Development” - and to all crises.

We need to build on our strengths and successes and continue to build alliances and generate synergies within the United Nations development system and the ECOSOC subsidiary bodies to strengthen the Council's role of translating international commitments into action.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Annual Ministerial Review will focus on “Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women”. The Council will highlight the gender-related MDGs, tackle the challenges that hamper their achievement and focus on those dimensions that need to be taken into account for the implementation of effective policies.

This theme is especially timely as 2010 marks the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

From Malaysia's own experience, I believe that in a globalised age when human resource is the most important that any country possesses, no country can sustainably develop over the long-term without the full involvement of women in all aspects of life.

While the means of involvement may be different, in each and every country that has achieved developed country status, this principle has held true.

To this end, the Council should strive to integrate global, regional and national perspectives. If used effectively, the mechanism of National Voluntary Presentations, with a record 14 countries volunteering this year, and of broad-based regional consultations, such as the just concluded regional meeting for Africa in Dakar, can strengthen the Council's accountability and implementing role.

Paramount to the success of the Council is the engagement of the broad range of actors who can contribute to the objectives of the 2010 AMR and advance the implementation of the gender agenda. Among them is the Special Event on Philanthropy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment that will be held on 22 February. I will endeavour to further broaden the range of stakeholders seeking to make a difference in the realization of the gender agenda with the United Nations. One initial step could be to expand multi-stakeholder engagement in the Secretary-General's *UNiTE Against Violence against Women Campaign*.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year, the Council will also hold its second Development Cooperation Forum. The current financial crisis and the implications for the global aid architecture, makes the work of the DCF even more urgent, in terms of increasing both the quantity and quality of aid.

I would like to highlight what I believe an important point – in these trying times, we need to convince the powers-that-be that difficulties in achieving the IADGs, particularly the MDGs will be compounded if we are to curtail development assistance now. Our colleagues in the national development assistance understand this. It is the Treasuries of the world that needs convincing. The collective voice of the international community can help to do this.

The 2010 DCF will be the result of a series of preparatory activities, including high-level symposia, designed to facilitate a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder dialogue process to examine trends in development cooperation. A special focus will be given to issues of quality and impact of aid in the area of gender equality and the empowerment of women. This process must aim at producing practical results and policy recommendations.

The Council should also continue strengthening its role and capacity to respond to emerging issues and crises. In particular, the Council should continue to provide a forum to enhance understanding of the implications of all crises on development efforts and to promote and enhance a coordinated response of the United Nations system. The challenge is to continue to keep the focus and follow up on current and future crises and to promote initiatives to mitigate their impact and prevent more disastrous consequences. The Council should address these issues and their implications on a wide-range of areas and outline the response of the United Nations system.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have a testing year ahead of us. We have a collective responsibility in ensuring that the Council plays its part towards our shared goal of achieving development for all.

Earlier on, I mentioned the 5 `musts'. Let me end with the most important of them all – we must succeed.

Thank you.