

2 July 2007

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,
for the Opening Session of the High-Level Segment of the Economic
and Social Council**

President of ECOSOC,

Secretary-General,

Her Excellency, Ms Micheline Calmy-Ray, President of the Swiss Confederation and Head of the Federal Government of Foreign Affairs.

His Royal Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, Prime Minister of Bahrain.

His Excellency, Mr. Gediminas Kirkilas, Prime Minister of Lithuania.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to address the 2007 high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council. This year is a special session. It marks the beginning of a new era for a strengthened ECOSOC, with new powers and responsibilities in accordance with General Assembly resolution (61/16).

The adoption of this resolution – which was the result of almost a year of consultations-, remains one of the important accomplishments of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly.

I believe the new mandates, including, the Development Cooperation Forum and the Annual Ministerial Review, can play a critical role in the global fight against poverty and the promotion of human development for all.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There are huge challenges ahead, particularly in meeting the high expectations of hundreds of millions of poor, and malnourished people, around the world. When poverty, such as this, is so immediate and the suffering so intense, the world has a moral and strategic obligation, to address the concerns of the poorest and most vulnerable, particularly in Least Developed Countries.

In recent years we have made progress, but we have not yet made poverty history. The challenge we all face is to live up to our commitments and work in solidarity through closer partnerships. I believe that we truly do have the capacity and resources necessary to make sure that each member of the human family is lifted out of poverty.

As a global community, both partner countries and donor countries alike have the ability to deliver on our promises. It is a reflection of our commitment to build greater trust among nations and forge a more effective multilateralism for the challenges of the 21st century.

Working in cooperation with the General Assembly, a renewed ECOSOC can stimulate progress, enhance cooperation and hold Member States to account for their commitments. In doing so we generate fresh hope for a better future where poverty and hunger are eradicated.

I hope that your discussions during the High-Level Segment can strengthen our ongoing partnership in the spirit of achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Accelerating implementation and promoting action on the development agenda has been at the centre of my Presidency of the General Assembly. In November 2006, the General Assembly brought together key stakeholders: Member States, civil society, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector, to take stock of progress and develop partnerships to achieve the MDGs. The debate concluded with a number of tangible outcomes and recommendations, predominantly the announcement by the Islamic Bank of a 10 billion dollar MDG fund.

The meeting also demonstrated the need to build an overarching mechanism to ensure follow-up and implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits on development.

The Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) is well placed to perform this role and address key issues such as the quality and quantity of aid, while, the Annual Ministerial Reviews (AMR) can provide a strategic policy framework for development cooperation.

These new mandates are complementary to the work that the General Assembly undertakes in the follow-up to the Monterrey Consensus and the Triennial Comprehensive Review of operational activities.

Strengthening our complementarities and the linkages between operational and normative work of the UN can improve the effectiveness of this organization. In doing so the United Nations can deliver more and better assistance to meet the Millennium Development Goals and other Development Goals and therefore our ability to improve the lives of those we are here to serve.

Another issue that is close to my heart is the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment. I truly believe that women are key to development. Despite many achievements and great progress, women still suffer discrimination and marginalization. We still have a long way to go, if we are to solidify a culture of gender equality in the 21st century.

However, progress is being made. The General Assembly's second thematic debate highlighted the broad based political commitment to making progress on this issue, and the need to empower women politically and economically. It emphasized that increasing the scope of micro-credit loans enhances the economic status of women and of those they are responsible for. The debate also reaffirmed that without gender equality and respect for women's human rights, the Millennium Development Goals will not be achieved.

The series of thematic debates that have been held during my Presidency will culminate with a debate on climate change on 31st July and 1st August; one of the biggest threats that humanity and this planet face today and in urgent need for global action. The debate is an opportunity to raise awareness about the growing scientific consensus, and to examine its relationship with the socio-economic processes in a number of developing countries. The debate will enable us all to translate this into political consensus for action in preparation for the Secretary-General's High-level event in September.

These meetings can build momentum in the run up to the Bali meeting of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change later this year.

Another major challenge facing the world today is HIV/AIDS. The sheer magnitude of suffering calls for an urgent response. In May, the General Assembly reaffirmed its commitment to tackling this human crisis, by adopting a decision on the "Implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS", which will pave the way for a more thorough review in 2008. I understand that the Council is also discussing these issues later today.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen

This is an exciting moment for us all to witness the launch of a strengthened ECOSOC. The Economic and Social Council, its subsidiary bodies, and responsibilities to coordinate the work of the funds and programmes of the United Nations system, is well placed to accelerate progress towards the internationally agreed development goals.

We need to strengthen implementation and ensure that monitoring mechanisms are more effective, coherent and commensurate with the growing demands for action.

Be it the realization of the MDGs, or addressing threats like climate change and HIV/AIDS, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council clearly have a complementary role.

During the High Level Segment you will address many of the issues that I have highlighted today.

Finally, this ECOSOC session in particular is close to my heart, not only as the President of the General Assembly but also as a Bahraini citizen. It is a matter of great pride and privilege for me to witness the presentation of the 2006 Special Citation of UN Habitat Scroll of Honour Award to His Royal Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, Prime Minister of Bahrain. Indeed, this is an honour for all of Bahrain – state, government and people. It reflects the recognition by the International Community for the immense and continuous efforts of His Royal Highness to enhance the socio-economic development in Bahrain under the patronage of His Royal Majesty King Hamad bin Issa Al-Khalifa, the King of Bahrain.

Thank you for your attention and may I wish all of you the greatest success in your deliberations.

Thank you.