

4 July 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss,
President of the 65th Session of the General Assembly,
at the High-level Segment of the Substantive Session of the Economic
and Social Council**

Translated from French

Mr. President of the Economic and Social Council,
Madam Deputy Secretary-General,
Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel privileged to join you today at the opening of the High-Level Segment of the Economic and Social Council.

As one of the principal intergovernmental organs of the United Nations, along with the General Assembly and the Security Council, ECOSOC plays a central role in world governance.

We are embarking on a month of intensive work. If we want to attract the attention of the world, and make sure that its eyes and ears are directed at us, we must make sure that our discussions have added value compared to discussions in other forums, and that they make a difference on the ground, in everyday life.

The subject selected for our thematic debate is education. We are all aware of the importance of education to personal fulfilment and economic prosperity. Education is vital to the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. It is a vehicle for social change, and for the empowerment of women. It has a proven positive impact on poverty reduction, on health and on the Millennium Development Goals as a whole.

Education is a burning issue. We are less than five years away from the deadline for achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. There are many challenges still in our way, particularly in connection with the education-related Goals.

Many countries have seen substantial progress in giving children primary-level education, but much remains to be done in the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and countries emerging from conflict.

All too often, we see wide disparities in education between the rich and the poor, between rural and urban dwellers, between women and men, and between girls and boys. What are the obstacles to overcome? How can the international community make better progress towards universal access to quality education? The substantive session will help to provide the answers to these questions.

There are other urgent questions to answer at a time when many countries' young people, even those with degrees, are out of work and resentful about it. How do we make sure that education promotes integration? How do we keep pace with the needs of the labour market? I believe that with the subject being so wide, and with other international institutions also discussing it, ECOSOC should devote particular attention to the economic and social aspects of education.

Moreover, the way for ECOSOC to assert itself as a major player on the international stage is to turn its attention to topical and strategic economic issues. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we find ourselves in urgent need of global economic governance to cope with worldwide challenges and bring about balanced and sustainable world economic growth. The arrangement must be representative, efficient and consistent, combining leadership, legitimacy and expertise. As the principal intergovernmental organ of the United Nations with responsibility for economic and social issues, ECOSOC has a central role to play in that governance system.

We must find the means to strengthen ECOSOC. The adoption of resolution 61/16 is a first step. This year, with the able support of Ambassador Errázuriz, Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations in New York, I conducted a review of the implementation of that resolution, and made a number of recommendations. I would encourage all the Member States to consider them and to take the action needed to implement them.

This first step is an important one, but it does not go far enough. With an informal group like the G20 asserting itself on the international stage as the pre-eminent forum for world economic governance, I think that ECOSOC needs more substantial reform if it is to avoid being marginalized.

The G20 demonstrated its ability to deal quickly, and in a concerted manner, with the 2008 financial and economic crisis. But efficiency does not bestow legitimacy. Could ECOSOC not have played a bigger part?

Last week in New York, the General Assembly held a thematic debate on global economic governance. It clearly recognized the comparative advantage which ECOSOC derived from its legitimacy in connection with global economic governance, and therefore also its potential to be a major player and natural partner of the G20 in that regard.

As a guarantor of legitimacy, ECOSOC must assert itself as the forum to which those involved in global economic governance, such as the G20, multilateral institutions and specialized economic programmes, must come to demonstrate their accountability. In order to establish regular interaction with the G20 and to ensure that ECOSOC is a credible interlocutor, its economic profile must be raised and its mandate must be urgently adjusted to focus on genuine economic and social issues.

Mr. President of the Economic and Social Council,
Madam Deputy Secretary-General,
Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have presented you with some food for thought, and I hope a basis for action. We have started ECOSOC reform. Let us not lose our momentum. I would like to wish you every success for the substantive session.