

First informal consultation of the General Assembly on the organization of the UN Conference on the world financial and economic crisis and its impact on development (12 February 2009, Conference Room 4, 3-5 p.m.)

Summary

The purpose of the meeting was to hear the views of Member States on the proposals by the President of the General Assembly (PGA) on the preparation and organization of the UN conference on the world financial and economic crisis and its impact on development, as contained in his letter of 28 January 2009, enclosing a draft resolution on modalities and a schedule of related events.

In his opening remarks, PGA outlined two fundamental objectives of the conference and the preparatory process leading up to it. First, in the face of the worst global economic crisis in decades, the world community must come together to mobilize financial resources to protect the most vulnerable segments of society and to avert a human catastrophe. Second, as the most representative world body, the United Nations should lead and facilitate global efforts to reconstruct the failed international financial and economic architecture. In this context, PGA highlighted the important role played by the UN system, through its many agencies, programs and funds, and praised the analytical work of DESA. In addition, he identified three core procedural issues that required early intergovernmental agreement: (i) the dates of the conference; (ii) the conference duration; and (iii) the nature of its outcome.

A total of 14 representatives made statements, including those who spoke on behalf of groups of countries, such as Sudan (G77 and China), Czech Republic (EU), Mexico (Rio Group) and New Zealand (CANZ). All speakers recognized the seriousness of the current crisis and its adverse impact on development, acknowledged the unique role of the United Nations and the utmost importance of the forthcoming conference in addressing the matter and pledged their strong commitment to full cooperation in the preparatory process. Most participants agreed that the PGA draft resolution constitutes a good basis for further discussions, in order to reach consensus on the modalities of the conference, through an open, transparent and inclusive preparatory process. However, there remains a substantial divergence of views between developed and developing countries on several key aspects of the conference preparation.

Substantive focus. Based on the Doha mandate, developing countries advocated a comprehensive approach to the substantive scope of the conference, including all aspects of the current crisis and its effects on the development agenda, especially those related to systemic failures. On their part, developed countries interpreted the Doha mandate to focus mainly on the developmental impact of the crisis, in a more narrow sense, with special attention to the situation in LDCs and Africa, as well as extreme poverty eradication and the achievement of MDGs.

Preparatory process. Many developed and developing countries suggested that all conference preparations should be carried out in a direct, inclusive, open and transparent

manner to ensure full participation of all relevant stakeholders. In particular, reference was made to BWIs, WTO, UNCTAD, OECD, ILO, regional organizations, civil society and the private sector. Several speakers (EU, CANZ, UK, US, Switzerland, Liechtenstein) also highlighted the need to ensure complementarities and convergence with other related events, such the G-20 summit, BWI and ECOSOC spring meetings and the G8 summit. In addition, there was a need to clarify the format, substance and duration of the thematic debate scheduled for 25-27 March.

Level of participation. While developing countries committed themselves to participation at the highest possible political level, preferably the summit level, developed countries (EU) reserved the right of each State to define the level of its participation at all segments of the conference. Moreover, EU proposed to apply the Monterrey and Doha rules of procedure, including those related to the participation of EC, BWIs and WTO.

Dates and duration. Most speakers agreed with the proposed dates at the beginning of June. However, many developed countries (EU) expressed their strong preference to limit the duration of the conference to two days, with one day as the high-level segment. Therefore, several speakers (CANZ, Russia, Japan, Liechtenstein) proposed to continue discussions on the timing and duration of the conference. Moreover, there was a need to define the themes and composition of the proposed round tables.

Outcome. Developing countries expressed their strong support to the PGA proposal that the conference should result in an intergovernmentally agreed outcome, while several developed countries questioned that proposal and favored instead a concise political message (EU) or a succinct summary/report (CANZ, Liechtenstein) or a short, precise and action-oriented document (Switzerland).

Role of the Secretariat. Several speakers (EU, CANZ, Rio Group) stressed the importance to have an input by the Secretary-General and/or by the UN Secretariat to the preparatory process and the conference itself. For example, Norway suggested that the Secretary-General be requested to submit a report for the conference.

Next steps. Developed countries (EU, CANZ, UK, US, Russia) saw the need to continue consultations at the expert level on the modalities of the conference, with a view to reaching consensus by the end of March. To this end, they undertook to submit more detailed comments and specific amendments to the PGA draft resolution. Moreover, several speakers (CANZ, US) suggested that facilitators be appointed to lead the process of negotiations. On the other hand, developing countries (G77, Rio Group) stressed the need to expedite the adoption of conference modalities, in order to begin substantive preparations.

In concluding, PGA reiterated his intention to circulate next Tuesday, 17 February, a revised draft resolution, so that the General Assembly would be able to take it up formally next Friday, 20 February.