

42nd Session of the Commission for Social Development

Introduction of agenda items 3(a): Priority theme: improving public sector effectiveness and 3(b): Review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups

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Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to introduce the reports of the Secretary-General under agenda items 3(a) and 3(b) entitled: Priority theme: improving public sector effectiveness; and Review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups, respectively.

First I would like to turn to agenda item 3(a) and the Report of the Secretary-General on “Improving public sector effectiveness” as contained in document E/CN.5/2004/5.

Before going into the content of the report, I would first like to thank the Government of Ireland for hosting a United Nations expert group meeting on this subject in June 2003 in Dublin. Several of the findings from this meeting were used in the preparation of this report. The report of this meeting is available in the room as well as on our website.

At the outset and in view of the mandate of the Commission for Social Development, I wish to stress that the report analyses the public sector from the perspective of its capacity to deliver social services effectively. Consequently, the report does not deal with the full gamut of public sector involvement.

Mr. Chairman,

The subject of improving public sector effectiveness sends somewhat of a mixed message. On the positive side, it clearly indicates that the existence of the public sector is not in question. Getting rid of the bureaucracy is not a serious option. Also on the positive side is the notion of “improving”. The public sector is at least not seen as beyond repair. The word “effectiveness”, on the other hand, would seem to inject a negative connotation, implying that the public sector is wanting in being effective. Of course, as a member of the UN Secretariat, I am well aware of these sentiments, as we have been seen as a bloated, wasteful bureaucracy, however always considered amenable to reform, of which we have had our fair share, and thus, by implication, to improvement.

But let me turn to the report before you. As you are aware the Report is divided into five sections. Under section I, the broad notion of the “public sector” is placed in the context of the activities of the United Nations and circumscribed in the light of the mandate of the Commission. The report states that since the issue of economic and social development in developing countries is central to the mandate of the United Nations, the role of the public sector continues to be one of the important items on its agenda. As a result, debates are increasingly about ways and means to improve the effectiveness of public institutions and public activities, and to increase their contribution to the realization of national and international goals. This recognition of the importance of stronger public institutions was especially brought out at the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly which stated: “to provide an

effective framework to ensure an equitable provision of basic social services for all ... and that an effective and accountable public sector is vital to ensuring the provision of social services”.

Section II of the report, evokes the context of the call for improving public sector effectiveness. Thus, this section describes how most Governments are under significant pressure to not only reduce the size of their public sectors, budgets and social expenditures, as well as their role in the economy and society, but to also improve their overall performance, i.e., accomplish more with reduced means while at the same time perform in a globalizing world, with a rapidly changing and highly interconnected environment that often leaves little room for error or freedom of choice.

Section III of the report analyses the concept of effectiveness as it applies to the public sector and its constitutive elements. This section notes, not surprisingly, that the public sector operates effectively when its results correspond to stated objectives. Three elements to assess its effectiveness in the delivery of social services are advanced namely: *accessibility*, that is reaching the intended population, *quality*, in other words, responsiveness of services to public needs and expectations, and *productivity*, or the efficiency of resource utilization. This section also addresses the differences between the public and private sectors and the need to acknowledge those differences. Perhaps one of the most important differences is that the public sector aims to increase availability and accessibility of services in an equitable way, especially to those who cannot afford them, rather than generate financial profits, the main objective of the private sector.

In section IV the report examines five different means currently considered to improve public sector effectiveness. The first deals with levels and methods of financing. Concerning the levels of financing, the challenges countries face in pursuing a more effective public sector vary greatly according to prevailing social and economic conditions. In many developing countries, especially the least developed countries, the resources available for the financing of public social services are simply too low for such services to yield significant results, thereby compromising effectiveness. However, it should be recognized, and it cannot enough be emphasized, that the financing of efficient social services is not only an “expenditure” but also a long-term investment for economic growth and overall development. With respect to the methods of financing: taxation is crucial. A fair and efficient taxation system is an important base for public sector effectiveness. Of course this does not negate the need for better management, allocation and distribution of government expenditures in the search for greater effectiveness.

The second means addresses methods of delivery. Governments have looked to alternative service delivery mechanisms to raise the effectiveness and efficiency of public service delivery. These include decentralization, privatization, and the introduction of non-governmental organizations, private-public partnerships and/or competitive market-based structures to supply services traditionally provided by the public sector. On this, the report stresses that it is necessary to exercise prudence in applying and implementing these alternative methods since not all of them are appropriate for every specific context or institutional environment.

The third means deals with privatization. The report recognizes that privatization of the provision of public goods and services is perhaps the most controversial of the alternative forms of service delivery. It is often associated with short-term disruptions and the long-term benefits remain open to dispute, particularly with regard to social services and the poor and vulnerable. International research supports a cautious approach and points to wide differences in the ability of countries to ensure equity through privatization. In sum, the State has an irreplaceable role in establishing and enforcing regulatory frameworks and standards to ensure that both public and private service providers deliver in accordance with contractual agreements.

The fourth means concerns social dialogue and participation. The public sector is placing a higher priority on becoming more “client-oriented” and more responsive to changing and emerging community needs. Citizen participation and social dialogue, which involves various stakeholders in needs assessments and the decision-making processes governing the delivery of services, play a major role in enhancing service quality and facilitating the effective functioning of the public sector.

The fifth and final means addressed in this section deals with public servants. How effectively and efficiently the public sector operates also depends on the competency and commitment of the workers who comprise the public service. Improving human resources within the public sector will make it more service- and performance-oriented.

Finally, in the last Section of the report, 11 recommendations are put forward for consideration by the Commission. This is not the place to go into detail into these recommendations. Suffice it to say that they are based on the analysis contained in the report. It is my hope, Mr. Chairman, that they, together with the overall content of the report will assist and be of use in the Commission's formulation of its outcome document under the priority theme.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me now turn to agenda item 3(b) and the three reports presented thereunder.

The report of the Secretary-General entitled “Views of Governments on the proposals contained in the Report of the Special Rapporteur on Disability (E/CN.5/2002/4) and especially on the suggested supplement to the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities” and contained in document E/CN.5/2004/4 is based on the responses by Governments to a note verbale dated 6 June 2003. The replies received by the Secretariat reflect the prevalent view that the majority of Member States agreed on the very important role that the Standard Rules have played during the last decade in informing the elaboration of national policies and legislation in the disability field. Member States also agreed on the fact that the extensive application of the Standard Rules led to experiencing shortcomings and areas in need of further elaboration. In general terms, the majority of Member States has been favourably predisposed to the adoption of the proposed Supplement to the Standard Rules.

Mr. Chairman,

The report of the Secretary-General entitled “Preparation for and observance of the Tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family (2004)” contained in document E/CN.5/2004/3 provides an overview of the major aspects of the preparations for the anniversary at the national, regional and international levels and suggests recommendations for follow-up actions. Without a doubt, the Tenth anniversary serves as an important opportunity for a review and appraisal process of achievements concerning family issues and programmes. Major objectives of the tenth anniversary of the Year are to increase awareness of family issues and review and assess the situation and needs of families, identifying specific issues and problems; to strengthen the capacity of national institutions to formulate, implement and monitor family policies, and enhance local, national and regional efforts to carry out specific programmes concerning families; to generate new activities and to strengthen existing ones; and to improve collaboration among national and international non-governmental organizations in support of families.

National plans for the observance entail numerous efforts, including research, legislative, policy, private sector and promotional and awareness raising components, as well as support for local initiatives for families and specific measures for special subgroups of families. To promote effective national action, the establishment of a national coordination mechanism and the formulation of a national programme of

action to observe the anniversary are suggested. To fulfill the objectives of the Tenth anniversary, the report recommends strengthening cooperation and mechanisms for consultation and advocacy in order to promote greater consensus on policy content and concepts, enhancing international cooperation in the area of family research, and promoting training and advisory services for the analysis, formulation and evaluation of integrated strategies, policies and programmes.

Mr. Chairman,

Finally, let me turn to the Note by the Secretariat entitled “Modalities for the review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing” as contained in document E/CN.5/2004/6 which reviews recent progress in defining modalities based on an expert group meeting that was held on this topic in November 2003 in Malta. The note points out that the review and appraisal process should focus on ageing specific policies as well as on a range of other measures aimed at mainstreaming an ageing dimension into national development strategies. An advocacy campaign geared at raising awareness in regard to the International Plan of Action on Ageing should be seen in the context of a bottom-up approach to assess the local needs of older persons. It envisages their direct involvement, thus establishing local ownership of implementation and follow-up. This will be complemented by setting targets and formulating appropriate programmes of action. In addition, the meeting in Malta elaborated a set of indicators to assist the bottom-up approach to the review and appraisal of the Madrid Plan. The findings that emanate from this process should be translated into recommendations for improving policy and programme design at the national level. In this regard, national coordinating bodies could be useful in facilitating and coordinating the process of implementing the Madrid Plan.

The Commission may wish to request the UN Regional Commissions to facilitate the review and appraisal process by promoting networking and sharing of information and experiences; assisting Governments in gathering, distilling and analyzing of information; and developing a regional analysis and defining priorities for future policy action. The Commission may also decide to undertake its review and appraisal every five years and may wish to select a specific theme emanating from the Madrid Plan for each review and appraisal cycle.

Mr. Chairman, I cannot conclude my statement without referring to my persistent insistence that the artificial divide between social and economic issues as they have been treated in the United Nations has to be overcome, a matter I stressed again at the last session of this Commission. It is therefore encouraging that the General Assembly, taking its cue from this Commission, adopted a resolution last fall in which it “emphasizes the importance of integrating economic and social policies in promoting human resources development and enhancing the process of development” and in which it “invites the Economic and Social Council, at the highest possible level, to assess the effectiveness of such integration and make recommendations in this regard to the General Assembly.” It is my hope, Mr. Chairman, that, as this approach takes root, my persistent insistence on this need on integrating social and economic policies will no longer be needed.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, let me assure you that we in the Secretariat stand ready to support the Commission in the successful completion of its work.

Thank you.

