



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

13 March 2018

Excellency,

I have the pleasure to transmit herewith a letter, dated 9 March 2018, from H.E. Ms. Alya Ahmed S. Al Thani, Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar and H.E. Mr. Einar Gunnarsson, Permanent Representative of Iceland, Co-facilitators to lead intergovernmental consultations on the ECOSOC review process, in accordance to Resolution 68/1 entitled “Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 61/16 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council”.

The Co-facilitators are convening the third informal meeting on Monday, 19 March 2018, at 10.00 hrs. in the Trusteeship Council Chamber. They are also sharing with Member States an informal “food for thought” paper to facilitate the discussion.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Lajčák', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Miroslav Lajčák

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York



PERMANENT MISSION
OF ICELAND TO THE UN

9 March 2018

Excellency,

This is in follow-up to our earlier letter dated 16 February 2018 regarding the General Assembly review of resolution 68/1.

We were encouraged by your engagement and thoughts during our recent informal meeting on 26 February which we found very useful.

As announced at that meeting, we are delighted to share with you an informal “food for thought” paper to facilitate our further discussion. The paper is based on the informal consultations convened with Member States on 6 and 26 February, as well as on written proposals received from delegations. The paper represents a compilation of the options suggested thus far by Member States and is offered as a basis for further reflection, proposals and analysis.

We look forward to seeing you and to your continued positive engagement at our next meeting that will take place on Monday 19 March at 10:00 am in the Trusteeship Council Chamber. At the meeting we hope to address the food for thought paper and seek your guidance on its content, elements missing from the paper, if any, and hear any additional comments or thoughts you may have.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

H.E. Ms. Alya Ahmed S. Al Thani
Permanent Representative of the
State of Qatar to the United Nations

H.E. Mr. Einar Gunnarsson
Permanent Representative of
Iceland to the United Nations

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York

**Review of implementation of GA resolution 68/1
Third informal consultations, 19 March 2018**

Food for Thought

The Co-Facilitators have prepared this Food for Thought paper based on the informal consultations convened with Member States on 6 and 26 February, as well as on written proposals received from delegations. The paper represents a compilation of the options suggested thus far by Member States and is offered as a basis for further reflection, proposals and analysis.

General remarks

A central intent of General Assembly resolution 68/1 is to strengthen the effectiveness of the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary system (the “ECOSOC system”) in providing support to integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

Resolution 68/1 underlines the critical role of the Council in generating the needed leadership, strategic direction and specific guidance on sustainable development at the global level. It also stresses the role of the Council in providing overall guidance and coordination of the UN development system. Effectively responding to the requirements of the 2030 Agenda at the global level is also one of the fundamental directions of change in the current efforts to reposition the UN development system.

The review provides an opportunity for Member States to review and refine the ECOSOC cycle and clarify roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability. The various functions of the ECOSOC cycle and their interlinkages could be augmented to strengthen the role and effectiveness of ECOSOC and to improve its alignment with the 2030 Agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Paris Agreement and the New Urban Agenda and other international agreements.

The review is related to current UN reform initiatives, such as the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, the UN Development System reform, the process of alignment of the agendas of the General Assembly and the ECOSOC and their subsidiary bodies in light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development the upcoming review of the HLPF by the General Assembly.

Possible areas of action

Annual main theme and substantive focus

In its resolution 68/1, the General Assembly requested the Council to adopt an annual main theme that will serve as the guiding theme throughout the ECOSOC cycle. The Council's subsidiary bodies and the governing bodies of the funds, programmes and specialized agencies were invited to contribute, as appropriate, to its work in keeping with the agreed theme.

The annual main theme intends to align the work of the Council, ECOSOC system and the UN development system and is aligned with the annual theme of the HLPF. The ECOSOC main theme strengthens an issues-based approach to enhance its role in identifying emerging challenges and promoting reflection, debate and innovative thinking, as well as in achieving a balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development. The policy recommendations emerging from the ECOSOC cycle's forums and segments and from the ECOSOC system as a whole inform the annual Ministerial Declaration.

Options suggested thus far:

- ECOSOC could have its main theme be the same as that of the HLPF.
- There could be an alignment of themes by having a unified theme throughout the ECOSOC system to ease theme fatigue and confusion.
- ECOSOC could strengthen the integration of gender equality into the work of ECOSOC and across other bodies of the UN system as a whole.
- ECOSOC could also, through its main theme, strengthen its cross-cutting focus on LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS.

Structure of the ECOSOC cycle:

Resolution 68/1 also adjusted the programme of work of ECOSOC to a July to July cycle and revised its structure around the annual main theme so as to support the review cycle. It created an integration segment and dedicated coordination and management meetings.

Options suggested thus far:

- The current July-to-July ECOSOC cycle on the main theme could be replaced with a January-to-January cycle in order to facilitate the inclusion and engagement of all Members.
- The segments of ECOSOC could be concentrated into two substantive sessions per year.
- The frequency and complexity of meetings during the ECOSOC cycle could be simplified taking into account organizational and procedural requirements.

ECOSOC HLS and HLPF

The ECOSOC cycle culminates in the High-level Segment (HLS) and the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) convened under the auspices of ECOSOC. The ECOSOC theme is aligned with the theme of the HLPF. ECOSOC's examination of its theme draws upon and integrates the work of the Council segments and forums, the ECOSOC system and the UN development system. The policy recommendations emerging from the ECOSOC segments and forums, and from the ECOSOC system as a whole, inform the annual Ministerial Declaration. As ECOSOC and the HLPF have adopted the same Ministerial Declaration, the Declaration is also informed by the discussions and various reviews conducted at the HLPF. The HLPF review of its own theme is supported by reviews conducted by UN system intergovernmental bodies. The HLPF also conducts a global review of SDG progress, a review of selected SDGs and voluntary national reviews.

Options suggested thus far:

- There should be a clear division of labour and functions between the ECOSOC HLS and HLPF, with each contributing added value. Overlaps should be addressed.
- There could be a decoupling of the HLPF from the HLS, *OR* the HLS could be eliminated, *OR* the HLPF and the HLS could be merged, taking into account the need to consider legal and procedural aspects.
- If the HLPF and HLS are merged, they could include:
 - a high-level day for the opening and adoption (only once) of the Ministerial Declaration;
 - eight days for VNRs and general debate – the ECOSOC Bureau could consider effective scheduling (such as 1 hour per VNR, 6 per day, 48 per year, 192 every four years) and templates to allow for cross-country comparisons;
 - one day for dialogue with the international financial institutions and closing.
- There could be a replacement of the HLPF's negotiated outcome by a Chair's summary (such as the President's Official Summary of DCF), while the HLPF under the auspices of the GA every four years would result in a political declaration.
- The GA may invite the ECOSOC Bureau to reconsider the arrangements for the VNRs. For example, the Bureau could consider capping the number of VNRs at 26-30 per year, and maintaining a 30-minute time limit, while giving countries the possibility to examine aspects of their VNRs in greater depth through side events.

Integration

In “The Future We Want”, ECOSOC was given the mandate, together with the HLPF, to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development. Its role in this regard is to bring together the work of the ECOSOC subsidiary bodies to provide technically-oriented guidance on policy integration.

Generating integrated policy guidance requires close coordination between the Council, the ECOSOC system and the UN development system with respect to agenda-setting and reporting, including specific timelines for all inputs, so that they can inform the global review by the Council. In particular, in resolution 68/1 Member States established an Integration Segment to provide specific, integrated and inclusive policy guidance and recommendations through the consolidation of inputs on the ECOSOC main theme from the ECOSOC system, the wider United Nations system, Member States and other relevant stakeholders.

Options suggested thus far:

- A new approach could be taken to the purpose of the integration segment or it could be suspended altogether.
- The Integration Segment could assume responsibility for the thematic reviews of the 2030 Agenda, as well as in the assessment of all the SDGs through the SDG Progress Report. It could also convene workshops to assist Member States in the preparation of the VNRs.
- The Integration Segment could be back-to-back with the HLPF, take a regional approach, and also address countries in special situations (LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS), integrating their specific development concerns into the review.
- The functions of the Integration Segment could be subsumed into the HLPF, which carries out an integration role, supported by the CMMs.

System-wide coherence and coordination

In resolution 68/1, the General Assembly decided that ECOSOC, through its Operational Activities for Development Segment, will

- provide overall coordination and guidance for operational development funds and programmes on a system-wide basis. Such guidance should include objectives, priorities and strategies in the implementation of the policies formulated by the General Assembly, including the quadrennial comprehensive policy review;
- concentrate this guidance on cross-cutting and coordination issues related to operational activities;
- focus on improving the overall impact of operational activities of the United Nations system in support of national development priorities.

In his recent report A/72/684–E/2018/7, the Secretary-General has proposed that Member States consider institutionalizing the ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment (OAS) as an accountability platform for system-wide performance on the 2030 Agenda. This could be realized several options, including biannual sessions of the OAS with distinctive focuses.

To avoid overlap with discussions taking place in the intergovernmental process on the UN Development System, only options and issues related to the structure of ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies have been reflected below.

Options suggested thus far:

- The OAS could have two sessions per year, the first in May and second in July:
 - The first session could be three days, with open-ended membership, encompassing the Chief Executives Board report and the UN briefing on the SDGs. This session would be convened just before the June Executive Boards meetings to provide guidance to the governing bodies;
 - The second session would be one day, after the HLPF, encompassing the dialogue with regional architecture.
- The timing of the OAS could be closer to, such as just before, the annual session of the executive boards of the Funds and Programmes.
- There may not be a need to have two OAS per year; a single session could be held in late June, after the meetings of the executive boards of the Funds and Programmes.

Development-humanitarian-peacebuilding nexus

In recognition of the inextricable link between humanitarian assistance and sustainable development, resolution 68/1 called for the Council to continue, through the Humanitarian Affairs Segment in June of every year, to contribute to strengthening the coordination and effectiveness of United Nations humanitarian assistance. It also called upon the Council to support and complement international efforts aimed at addressing humanitarian emergencies, including natural disasters, in order to promote an improved, coordinated response by the United Nations.

These calls have been complemented by the most recent Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR), where Member States requested the United Nations development system to enhance coordination with humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding efforts at the national level in countries facing humanitarian emergencies and countries in conflict and post-conflict situations.

The legislative basis for a relationship between ECOSOC and the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) is derived from General Assembly resolutions 60/180 and 61/16. In 2016, the review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture stressed the importance of closer cooperation between ECOSOC and the PBC, and the centrality of development to sustaining peace. The review encouraged the PBC to draw on the expertise of relevant parts of the Economic and Social Council system.

In his recent report A/72/684–E/2018/7, the Secretary-General has proposed that Member States consider using the Humanitarian Affairs Segment (HAS) to enhance guidance on the development system’s coordination with humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding efforts. He has suggested that Member States could, for example, leverage a redesigned ECOSOC transition event on development and humanitarian collaboration, which could be held back-to-back with the Council’s HAS to promote coherence, as well as the joint meeting of ECOSOC and the Peacebuilding Commission. The Secretary-General has advanced these proposals in an effort to help consolidate ECOSOC’s role as an intergovernmental space to reinforce the UN’s transition towards a culture of prevention and with a focus on results.

To avoid overlap with discussions taking place in the intergovernmental process on the UN Development System, only options and issues related to the structure of ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies have been reflected below.

Options suggested thus far:

- ECOSOC could highlight the development-humanitarian-peacebuilding nexus and support substantive implementation.
- The OAS and the HAS could be more effectively coordinated with each other, as well as with the Peacebuilding Commission.
- A redesigned annual ECOSOC event on development and humanitarian collaboration, better coordination of this event with the OAS, and continued development of the annual joint meeting of ECOSOC and the Peacebuilding Commission will be able to produce substantive collaboration.
- The OAS and HAS could be convened back to back. The HAS could include a briefing by the Joint Steering Committee (UNDP and OCHA).
- ECOSOC could strengthen the development-humanitarian nexus to effectively prepare for natural disasters.
- The ECOSOC Transition Event, which links discussions between the ECOSOC OAS and HAS, could focus on protracted crises.

Emerging and frontier issues

The General Assembly emphasized in resolution 68/1 that the Council “needed a strengthened issues-based approach to enhance its lead role in identifying emerging challenges and promoting reflection, debate and innovative thinking, as well as in achieving a balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development. In addition to its focus on its main theme, the Council analyses and discusses frontier issues that warrant a global response.

Options suggested thus far:

- ECOSOC could play a leadership role in emerging and frontier issues, increasing its relevance in a fast-changing world.
- ECOSOC could effectively analyse and address frontier issues, such as technological change, and coordinate with other fora on such issues.
- In addressing emerging issues, consideration could be given to ECOSOC’s objectives and outcomes to ensure that they add-value and produce results.

Stakeholder engagement

Resolution 68/1 emphasized the important role that the Economic and Social Council plays as a platform for multi-stakeholder participation and for engaging all relevant stakeholders in the work of the Council, particularly with respect to its integration function and contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The resolution mandated ECOSOC to strengthen the active participation of major groups, non-governmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders. Resolution 68/1 also stressed that ECOSOC should further promote the integration of youth into its deliberations, building on the past positive experiences of the informal youth forums, and that the Council should also continue with the informal partnership forums.

Options suggested thus far:

- There could be increased stakeholder engagement as determined by ECOSOC.
- There could be a streamlining of the rules for stakeholder participation to increase their engagement.
- There could be greater participation of more diverse stakeholders.
- There could be a review of the work of the NGO Committee to strengthen its effectiveness and transparency, depoliticize its work and disallow immediate term renewals.

Coordination and management

Resolution 68/1 created dedicated Coordination and Management Meetings (CMMs) to effectively carry out its coordination and management functions.

There are some 30 UN bodies that have a direct reporting relationship to the Council: eight functional commissions, five regional commissions, three standing committees, one ad hoc body, eight expert bodies and four related bodies. ECOSOC also reviews the work of another 14 standing bodies that report formally to the GA.

Resolution 68/1 also called for a closer engagement between the work of ECOSOC and its system to maximize the benefit of the substantive work of its subsidiary machinery. The resolution mandates that the adoption of the Council's annual main theme be decided based on inputs from the subsidiary bodies, as well as from Member States.

The resolution also called upon ECOSOC and its system to harmonize their respective work programmes and consider changes to their methods of work, reporting and timing of sessions. This was intended to facilitate consideration of substantive changes to their work programmes, if required, as well as of meaningful ways to contribute to the High-Level Segment and the High-Level Political Forum under the auspices of ECOSOC.

The timing of the CMMs need to consider the calendar of meetings of the subsidiary and related bodies as well as the timing of the issuance of the reports of these bodies for consideration by ECOSOC.

Options suggested thus far:

- The CMMs could be important for formal and procedural functions; its current substantive aspects could be integrated into other segments.
- The CMMs could be reduced to two days, such as in July.
- The CMMs could actively discuss and integrate the reports and outcomes of the subsidiary bodies, including their policy recommendations; be streamlined to meet twice per year; and timed with due consideration to the calendar of meetings of the subsidiary and related bodies as well as to accommodate the availability of their reports for consideration by the Council.

ECOSOC subsidiary bodies and support

In resolution 68/1, the General Assembly sought the establishment of a more coherent and integrated ECOSOC system, where all components of the Council—and its annual cycle—are complementary and deliver results “greater than the sum of its parts”. The resolution reflected Member States’ awareness of the need for ECOSOC to improve the use of its entire analytical reserves and intergovernmental architecture to support the implementation, follow-up and review of the new sustainable development agenda. A key priority has been improving the complementarity and effectiveness within the ECOSOC system, drawing on the different strengths of each subsidiary body. However, historically, ECOSOC had operated in a highly decentralized manner where the Council largely took note of decisions made by its subsidiary bodies.

There have been some concerns that the contributions of the Council's various subsidiary bodies are sometimes limited by a range of factors – distinct working methods, agendas and calendar sequencing, among others – in contributing to the Council's work in keeping with the agreed theme. However, with sufficient notice and a multi-year perspective in choosing themes, the ECOSOC system could be better positioned to adjust their work, to support and enrich the Council's work.

Options suggested thus far

- There could be more effective integration of the subsidiary bodies into ECOSOC's work and greater integration of their policy recommendations within the HLPF.
- There could be a discussion on the operation and functionality of ECOSOC subsidiary bodies, with a view to reducing duplication in mandates and improving efficiency.
 - This discussion should not only focus on where improvements can be made but should consider the specific attributes of the respective subsidiary bodies of ECOSOC and the unique value each brings to bear with respect to guidance and recommendations for the 2030 Agenda, whether, for example, as an intergovernmental space, a more independent, expert-led body, or an enhanced multi-stakeholder platform.
 - Additionally, it could discuss how each forum can maximize its impact and relevance of the policy guidance it produces. Whether it is the Ministerial Declaration or the agreed conclusions, decisions and resolutions resulting from the ECOSOC system's various deliberations, the Council could improve the impact of its overall policy dialogue and recommendations.
- There could be a discussion on the contribution of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat as to ensure that its work is organized in an integrated, cohesive, coordinated and collaborative manner pursuant to the mandate articulated in paragraph 16 of resolution 70/299 and in follow-up to paragraph 25 of resolution 68/1.
- Subsidiary bodies could be encouraged to hold discussions on their methods of work with the aim of delivering on Agenda 2030, as well as how they can best contribute to the work of the Council more broadly, such as through developing multi-year programs of work that consider the future themes of ECOSOC.