



23 February 2021

Excellency,


We have the honour to transmit herewith a summary of the Joint Briefing of the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) convened on 27 January 2021 in the General Assembly Hall at 3 p.m.

The Joint Briefing was convened to provide updates and hear the views of Member States on: (i) the alignment process; (ii) the review of ECOSOC and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development; (iii) Financing for Development; (iv) Least Developed Countries; and v) the COVID-19 recovery.

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



Volkan BOZKIR
President of the seventy-fifth session
of the General Assembly



Munir AKRAM
President of the Economic and
Social Council at its 2021 session

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

Joint Briefing by the President of the General Assembly and the
President of the Economic and Social Council

*Towards coherence in the work of the General Assembly and the Economic
and Social Council*

Wednesday, 27 January 2021

United Nations General Assembly Hall, UN Headquarters, New York

The President of the General Assembly, H.E. Volkan BOZKIR, and the President of the Economic and Social Council, H.E. Munir Akram, convened a Joint Briefing on Wednesday, 27 January 2021 to facilitate coherence in the work of the General Assembly (GA) and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

The Presidents' Joint Briefing offered updates on: (i) upcoming events of the GA and ECOSOC, (ii) the GA process on the alignment of agendas of intergovernmental bodies, (iii) the GA review of ECOSOC and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), (iv) Financing for Development, (v) Least Developed Countries and (vi) the COVID-19 recovery. Additionally, the briefing benefitted from an exchange of views and perspectives on cooperation among and by the Member States with the two United Nations principal organs. ([Recording of the Joint Briefing here](#))

In his opening remarks, the President of the General Assembly (PGA) highlighted that the joint briefing intends to underscore the commitment of both the GA and ECOSOC to continue mutually reinforcing efforts. Such an approach is needed to support the global COVID-19 response and to both respond from the pandemic and accelerate progress on the 2030 Agenda. It is imperative that the GA and ECOSOC make every effort to cooperate, strengthen efforts, address overlapping mandates, and improve the efficiency, content and quality of their work.

The PGA acknowledged the importance of the GA review of ECOSOC and the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). He further underscored the central role of ECOSOC in the discussion regarding the sustainable development agenda and the role of the HLPF as the primary platform for deliberations in that regard. Key to the achievement of the SDGs and recovering better from the COVID-19 pandemic is targeted and comprehensive support from the UN System to Member States. The PGA commended the membership on the adoption of the GA Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) of the UN system operational activities and the reform of the UN development system, which will directly impact the support provided to countries during this critical time.

The Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) represent almost half of the United Nations membership yet are faced with a disproportionate number of challenges and burdens. The PGA recalled his appointment of a Board of Advisers on LDCs, LLDCs and

SIDS and highlighted the mandated joint event of the GA and ECOSOC on LDCs on 18 June 2021 under the theme “Accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda in LDCs to leave no one behind in the context of COVID-19”.

In relation to financing for development, the PGA highlighted the need to firmly address recurring gaps and to connect this with COVID-19 recovery efforts. He underscored the need for bold policies on debt forgiveness and noted that the GA-mandated special segment of the ECOSOC Financing for Development Forum will focus on recovery from COVID-19. Additionally, the PGA urged all countries to support the COVAX Facility and multilateral efforts to ensure fair and equitable access to vaccines.

In recognition of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA), an important milestone in fighting against racism, the PGA commended the efforts of the Secretariat to address racism in the UN System. He expressed regret that racial discrimination continues to haunt the peoples of the world and must remain a consistent and core issue of the United Nations.

A United Nations that is fit for purpose, with the capacity to adequately address global challenges, is a shared priority for the presidencies. 2021 is critical for the GA and ECOSOC to shift the world onto a better, more sustainable, more resilient, more equitable track. The PGA reiterated the need for ever-closer collaboration and cooperation between the GA and ECOSOC, and the importance of pursuing progress in the GA Alignment process towards that end.

In his opening remarks, the President of ECOSOC emphasized the shared determination of the two Presidents to ensure that the GA and ECOSOC complement and reinforce each other’s work. He also emphasized that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to unfold as a health, social, economic, and humanitarian crisis, which is disproportionately affecting the poorest and most vulnerable peoples and countries.

The ECOSOC Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation in May and other ECOSOC segments and forums will also address ways to mobilize technologies to recover better from the pandemic.

In order to synthesize efforts of the two principal organs, the President of ECOSOC highlighted that the ECOSOC operational activities segment will convene dialogues to ensure that the UN system is on track to respond to the vision and recommendations of the QCPR.

In line with his vision to address the challenge of widening inequalities, the President mentioned that on 18 February 2021 he will convene a special meeting at ministerial level on “Reimagining Equality: Eliminating racism, xenophobia and discrimination for all in the decade of action for the SDGs”. The meeting will explore the links between structural racism, inequalities and the SDGs.

The President of ECOSOC also emphasized that in order to identify the disproportionate challenges faced by LDCs, he is working with the PGA to prepare the joint thematic event on “Accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda in LDCs to

leave no one behind the context of the COVID-19” in June. Participants will be invited to make specific proposals and recommendations in support of LDCs.

The President stressed that the 2021 ECOSOC Financing for Development Forum on 12-15 April 2021 will be especially critical this year. It is vital to agree on short-term and longer-term actions to enable a recovery from the COVID health and economic crisis. He underscored that in line with the GA resolution, he will convene a special high-level segment of the Financing for Development (FfD) Forum to discuss concrete steps towards a sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery from the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The President of ECOSOC outlined his intention to invite Heads of State and Government to participate in the special segment.

The President of ECOSOC further emphasized that, through the GA review of the ECOSOC and the HLPF, Member States can build on the achievements and dynamism of the HLPF over its first five years to enhance support for the SDGs. The broad mandate of ECOSOC as one of the principal bodies of the UN, its adaptability to changing circumstances, and its ability to build system-wide coherence are attributes which can be strengthened in the review process. The President of ECOSOC is determined to ensure that the Council produces concrete outcomes this year. Refocusing the work of intergovernmental bodies on the key issues of the 2030 Agenda and making it more efficient is essential for the success of each organ and for coherence and efficiency within the UN.

Key messages from Member States interventions

During the discussion and exchange of views that followed the opening statements, Member States focused on the alignment process, the review of ECOSOC and the HLPF, FfD, LDCs and the recovery from COVID-19.

Synergy between the General Assembly and ECOSOC

- The Joint Briefing was welcomed and acknowledged as significant to enhance synergies and coherence in the work of the United Nations GA, the ECOSOC, their subsidiary bodies, and the HLPF in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda as well recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- This year’s briefing took place at a unique time for multilateralism and solidarity in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Coherence was key not only to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, yet also broadly to the evolution towards a United Nations system which reflects the UN75 Declaration and especially the vision of an “upgraded United Nations”.

Alignment

- The GA Alignment process aims to ensure coherence and synergies among agendas of the Assembly, ECOSOC and its functional commissions and expert bodies in streamlining their respective agendas with a view to accelerating the implementation of 2030 Agenda, with special focus on the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions.
- The alignment needs to increase efficiency and maximize the value of each intergovernmental organ or forum with a view to comprehensively and efficiently address the complexity of the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, it is a crucial opportunity to recalibrate the deliberations of the GA and ECOSOC in support of Member States for recovering better and ensuring efficiency, coherence, and coordination in the work of the United Nations.
- The alignment can further maximize the UN-system-wide support to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Now is the time to deliver results, especially through the Decade of Action. In this regard, gaps, overlaps and duplications would need to be addressed from the perspectives of the functions of different United Nations bodies and approached in the context of addressing the socio-economic and environmental impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic with unity, solidarity and a renewed commitment to a global response.
- This year serves as an opportunity to realize progress in light of the work done in previous sessions, the Decade of Action, lessons learned from the circumstances of the pandemic and the adjustments made by the United Nations bodies in their support to Member States.

The Review of the ECOSOC and the HLPF

- The review of ECOSOC and the HLPF is critical for improving the impact of the UN intergovernmental meetings on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The review is thus ultimately about enhancing the contribution of the United Nations to improving the lives of all people everywhere.
- The review serves as an opportunity to look at the interconnections between the Council and the Forum's work and structures, and to identify complementarities and space for enhanced coherence, coordination and efficiency. Additionally, the process is an opportunity to re-energize collective faith in multilateralism and demonstrate the results it can achieve during times of crisis – to make improvements while preserving what has worked well. The outcome of the GA review process needs to be relevant, action-oriented, consensus-based, inclusive, sustainable and impactful.
- ECOSOC was seen to add value in overseeing the work of a number of entities and bodies working on sustainable development and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, identifying emerging challenges, promoting innovation and

providing guidance to the UN system on how to work better together. Further potential lies in the Council's oversight, coordination and guidance functions, in this regard, ECOSOC must be strengthened to deliver the best possible outcomes.

- The HLPF serves as the platform for review and follow-up of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including through its space for the exchange of experiences and presentation of progress during the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and the reviews of the SDGs. For the HLPF to serve its function during the Decade of Action, ensuring peer learning is essential, and
- The VNRs are valued by Member States and stakeholders and their main characteristics and focus must be preserved with due consideration for adequate time for Member States to present VNRs.

Financing for Development

- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has placed additional challenges on the financing for development agenda. The economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to be severe. The SDG finance gap has only been exacerbated by this crisis which requires strong international cooperation and international solidarity.
- The substantial financial resources mobilized to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic should contribute to building back better and to moving countries closer to the SDGs and the Paris Agreement objectives. Sufficient funding is a prerequisite for the success of the Decade of Action. Progress must continue to be made in implementing and aligning international goals and policy actions with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development.
- Responding to the pandemic and supporting the realization of the 2030 Agenda also requires an approach to development finance that significantly increases long-term public and private investments, promotes public-private partnerships, and seeks to combat illicit financial flows, while aligning private finance with the SDGs.
- It is essential that the growth in inequalities is contained and that climate and environmental sustainability is strengthened. Filling financial gaps and bringing about tangible outcomes must be achieved while considering the individual circumstances of each country.
- In the context of COVID-19, the ECOSOC, through its FfD Forum, needs to play a crucial role in advancing short- and long-term solutions for financing sustainable development in the context of the crisis, and addressing the needs of all developing countries. The continued prioritization of the most vulnerable in development and financial work is critical.

- The ECOSOC's FfD Forum and its special high-level segment on COVID-19 will take place during this key moment for getting back on track for sustainable development. It will be important to discuss immediate concrete steps towards a sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery from the economic downturn caused by the pandemic.

Least Developed Countries

- The Fifth UN Conference on LDCs provides an opportunity for the international community to reinforce its support and solidarity with the LDCs, which are now particularly vulnerable.
- Comprehensive preparations must be undertaken to design a new programme of action for LDCs that is backed by analytics, science-based data and statistics.
- It is crucial to support developing countries in achieving the SDGs and addressing the special challenges experienced by the most vulnerable countries.
- Support for the LDCs and SIDS should be reinforced and is a top priority leading up to the Fifth UN Conference on LDCs to ensure its success.
- As the debt burden is rising for LDCs, LLDCs, SIDS, and countries in special situations, ambitious measures are urgently needed for debt relief and debt restructuring to accelerate the implementation of the global goals.

COVID-19 recovery

- Climate change, environmental degradation, and economic and social inequalities have been exacerbated by the challenges of COVID-19 accompanied by economic recession. The growing digital divide and its impacts have become apparent.
- The health, economic and social emergencies caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, racial discrimination, gender inequality and climate change are too complex for countries to overcome on their own. International cooperation and solidarity are critical. Listening to and canvassing views is also essential to deliver the appropriate global consensus that is expected of the UN.
- Vaccine distribution must be declared a global public good and universal access to vaccines, medicine, treatment and other health technologies irrespective of country and social status should be implemented.
- There is an urgent need for more sustainable funding for the procurement of COVID-19 vaccines and the need for direct support to help countries in special situations respond to the socioeconomic effects of the pandemic.
- Other related challenges that must be urgently addressed include promoting decent work, gender equality, and the empowerment of women and girls on the path to equitable and universal access to health care and other social services and technologies.

Closing

In closing, the President of ECOSOC emphasized the continued efforts of both Presidents to try and promote the work of the GA and ECOSOC in a synergetic and coherent manner. He noted that the UN is a complex system, yet there is strength in its diversity. All members should see value-added by acting as one in a cooperative way. To combat COVID-19, the responses must be bold, courageous, innovative, and collective.

The President of the General Assembly stated that the open discussion reflected a broad commitment to the effective and coherent collaboration of the GA and ECOSOC. Meaningful outcomes can be reached in response to the most pressing problems faced today. The innovative and ambitious suggestions presented during the briefing will influence the upcoming high-level engagements to lay a solid foundation for the path forward.