

**Informal Summary
General debate for the High Level Segment
2008 Economic and Social Council**

UNHQ, New York, 1-2 July 2008

Key messages:

- **A confluence of crises – among them the soaring cost of food and fuel, financial turmoil and the threat of climate change – threaten to undermine progress towards the MDGs, especially in the most vulnerable countries.**
- **Urgent short-term assistance is necessary to address the global food crisis, but must be undertaken in parallel with longer-term solutions arising from collective and collaborative action by all members of the international community. Increased investment in rural development and promotion of agricultural productivity should be part of the approach.**
- **Clean, affordable, renewable energy sources must be developed and shared to reduce the world's carbon footprint and shield economies from the increase of oil prices. Yet concern was expressed regarding the impacts of biofuel production on food security and climate change.**
- **Trade and macro-economic policies need to be improved: trade-distorting subsidies and tariffs, especially in the agricultural sector, must be eliminated; and markets should be opened to products from developing countries. A successful conclusion to the Doha round of trade negotiations is needed.**
- **It will not be possible to achieve the MDGs without the world taking a more sustainable path to development. All countries must live up to prior commitments, including from Agenda 21, Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and the Monterrey Consensus. Mitigation and adaptation measures, including disaster-risk reduction, must be pursued to respond to the threat of climate change.**
- **States welcomed the first Development Cooperation Forum and expressed a strong desire to see it emerge as the main forum for dialogue on key issues of the development cooperation agenda, including aid effectiveness, appropriation, harmonization, alignment, results and mutual accountability.**
- **Delegations also welcomed the exchange of information and lessons-learned at the Annual Ministerial Review's National Voluntary Presentations. Participation by developed countries was seen as a step forward in promoting mutual accountability in the fulfillment of international commitments in development cooperation.**

H.E. Mr. Léo Mérorès, President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), opened the general debate for the high-level segment of the ECOSOC substantive session of 2008. He stated that this year's session marks a milestone for the Council as the two new functions of ECOSOC mandated by the 2005 World Summit - the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) and the Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) - are being held together for the first time in a full fledged manner. Stating that climate change and environmental degradation, coupled with the twin challenges of rising food and fuel prices, and volatility in international financial markets, are threatening to reverse progress towards achieving the internationally

agreed development goals, the President exhorted member states to enhance collaboration and policy coherence in order to tackle these challenges collectively. In this regard, Mr. Mérorès highlighted the role of the AMR and the DCF in promoting sharing of ideas on international development cooperation and aid effectiveness.

Mr. Thomas Stelzer, Assistant-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, introduced the reports of the Secretary-General for the second Annual Ministerial Review (E/2008/12) and for this year's thematic discussion (E/2008/68). He reported that recent global economic growth has enabled a stronger financial, technological and policy basis for progress towards realizing sustainable development. However, unsustainable consumption and production patterns, marginal improvements in resource productivity, as well as overwhelming increases in demand have jeopardized the process of development. Mr. Stelzer highlighted five recommendations from the AMR report. First, countries need to develop policy frameworks for integrating economic, social and environmental objectives. Second, there must be greater involvement of actors representing all spheres of society. Third, mitigating climate change will require tradeoffs: substantial short-term costs in return for long-term gains. Fourth and fifth, it is necessary to direct attention to reversing environmental degradation and to undertake greater efforts to promote technology transfer on a concessional and preferential basis.

The report of the Secretary-General on rural development urged the international community to act swiftly to protect the most vulnerable against the rapid increase in food prices. For the medium- and long-term, high food prices, together with the heightened threat of climate change, will require well-coordinated, coherent programmes to promote sustainable rural development, featuring agricultural productivity improvement. The report also underscored the need for other long-term measures, such as investment in technologies and infrastructure and provision of social protection.

Mr. Ricardo Ffrench-Davis, Chairman of the Committee for Development Policy (CDP), presented part of the report of the tenth session of the CDP, which addressed the theme of the 2008 AMR. In particular, the Committee examined key elements through which climate change can adversely affect sustainable development and ways of shielding against such impacts, namely, through adaptation and mitigation policies, effective international cooperation and improved policy coherence. Mr. Ffrench-Davis stated that climate change should be addressed through a wider sustainable development agenda. He urged nations to engage in activities that are less carbon intensive and that encourage adaptive capacities in developing countries. Reduction targets must be regionally differentiated and based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. Quasi markets and emission rights, price controls, pollution and carbon taxes, as well as direct regulation have all proved insufficient in curtailing current levels of pollution. He therefore underscored the need to find alternative channels of action.

Mr. Ffrench-Davis also emphasized the importance of investment as well as the need to strengthen institutional capacities. Energy transition strategies that direct resources to efficient, renewable channels of energy production were highlighted. Mitigation requires assistance from the developed world through financial and technological transfers. Finally, he emphasised that international cooperation, along with the integration of sustainable development into national

development strategies, is the only route to sustained economic progress in the long run and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The floor was then opened for the General Debate among Member States, UN agencies and other stakeholders.

Progress towards the development goals

Delegations highlighted their countries' progress in the implementation of internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. Many affirmed that they had taken into consideration the three pillars of sustainable development -- economic growth, social development, and environmental protection -- and included these principles in their national development and poverty reduction policies. Some nations supported the recommendations contained in the AMR report for international financial and technical collaboration to provide assistance for the development of policy frameworks to ensure sustainable growth. A number of countries reported that they had experienced high rates of economic growth in past years, which had facilitated progress towards the MDGs, and stressed that continued growth is vital for sustainable development. Several highlighted the benefits of increased agricultural investments and the merits of developing integrated frameworks on rural and agricultural development. It was reiterated that countries face different challenges and therefore should adopt country-specific strategies

Despite having achieved some progress towards the MDGs over the past decade, **the European Union (EU)** stated that it has been too slow and uneven. **The Group of 77 and China (G77)** observed that fundamental structure challenges persist, including widespread poverty, growing inequities among and between states, an unsustainable pattern of production and consumption, environmental mismanagement leading to climate change, and an entrenched inequality in the distribution of power in decision making. The **G77** and the **EU**, along with many other delegations noted that this is a challenging moment in history, pointing to a confluence of emerging crises – including the soaring cost of food and fuel, financial turmoil and the threat of climate change – that pose the risk of undermining progress achieved, especially in the most vulnerable countries.

Food Crisis

Many countries saw the current food crisis as the most pressing global challenge. Short-term humanitarian assistance in response is urgently needed to avert human suffering. Least Developed Countries (LDCs), especially in sub-Saharan Africa, and small-island developing states (SIDS), most of which are net importers of agricultural and food products, suffer most. Within those countries, the most vulnerable are hardest hit, particularly women. Countries called for increased humanitarian assistance in cooperation with international organizations, including UN agencies, which urgently require additional funding. Many countries welcomed the United Nations Task Force on Global Food Security Crisis established by the Secretary General and expressed the need to fulfil commitments made during the High-Level Conference on World Food Security, hosted by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in June 2008. Several countries also welcomed ECOSOC's special meeting on the Global Food Crisis.

However, many countries stressed that short-term measures must be complemented by longer-term solutions. **Chile** noted the food crisis presented an opportunity to reassess the rural sector, given concerted efforts by governments and the international community. Major efforts and assistance to increase agricultural productivity are needed to reduce poverty by providing livelihoods for smallholder farmers and to secure adequate food supplies. Irrigation, rural infrastructural development, increased use and development of climate-resilient, high-yielding varieties of seeds and extensive use of fertilizers were among the examples cited by delegations to increase agricultural productivity. Technology transfer and financial assistance with regard to increasing agricultural productivity were emphasized by developing countries and supported by donor countries. It was stressed that decline in aid on agriculture must be addressed.

Oil crisis

Sharp rises in oil prices have not only perpetuated a global economic slowdown but, in association with the food crisis, have also contributed to increasing levels of poverty. It was in this context that nations discussed the use of alternative sources of energy. Several delegates stressed that clean, affordable and renewable energy sources must be developed and widely deployed in order to reduce the world's carbon footprint and shield economies from the rise of oil prices. The **EU** emphasized that the transition to a low-carbon economy cannot be achieved without private sector involvement, and that market-based instruments are vital in order to work out a price for carbon and to direct private sector investment towards clean technologies and sustainable patterns of production and consumption. Countries debated the production of biofuels as a way to achieve energy security. It was stressed that the use of staple food supplies as resources for biofuel production should be avoided, as this would jeopardize global food security. In addition, concern was expressed by some that certain biofuels are economically and environmentally inefficient, in that they fail to substantially reduce the emission of greenhouse gases, while exacerbating global food insecurity. Others supported the use of biofuels in a broader sustainable perspective to achieve the MDGs.

Financial and debt crisis, trade

The **G77** observed that the multiple crises are inter-related and mutually reinforcing, including the food crisis, the climate and environmental crisis, the energy crisis, a financial crisis, as well as a crisis of confidence in international institutions which were created to provide policy advice and coordination on global issues. Several countries voiced growing unease over the current credit crisis and slowing economic growth in several industrialised countries, which, coupled with inflation, most markedly in food and fuel prices, have exacerbated global financial volatility. Some developing country representatives reiterated the need to address the imbalances of the multilateral trading system. The **G77** called attention to the deleterious impact of inappropriate and incoherent global trade and macro-economic policies, programmes and advice on development prospects, and urged immediate elimination of trade-distorting subsidies and other market distorting measures by developed countries, especially in the agricultural sector. Governments were also urged to open markets for products from developing countries. Many delegations, including the **G77**, stressed that a successful conclusion in Doha was needed to address these issues and boost the world economy.

Climate change

Many speakers highlighted the projected devastating effects of climate change on ecosystems and agricultural production, especially in SIDS and LDCs. Stating that erratic wind and water-cycle patterns, rising sea levels, deforestation, desertification, floods, droughts, and losses in marine and aquatic resources are all manifestations of climate change, countries urged all Member States to follow sustainable paths toward development. In this regard, the **EU** highlighted the need for a successful negotiation of an international agreement on climate change in Copenhagen in 2009, reiterating its commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020, and its offer to raise that level to 30% if other Parties undertake comparable efforts. The importance of all nations committing themselves to the Kyoto Protocol and the Bali Action Plan was also highlighted by some. Demonstrating its commitment to fight climate change, **Ecuador** asked the international community for compensation for its decision to not extract 920 million barrels of oil, forgoing \$720 million in revenue over 25 years, but avoiding the production of 100 million tons of carbon. Many interventions from both developing and developed countries underscored the importance of transfer of technology and know-how, including strengthening administrative and monitoring capacities of the public sector, especially to meet challenges presented by climate change.

Sustainable development and environmental issues

It was recognized that we cannot achieve the MDGs without putting the world on a more sustainable path to development. The **EU** emphasized that there can be no sustainable development without finding efficient solutions to overcome the current threats to our planet. **Switzerland** observed that poverty, patterns of production and consumption and natural resource management are interdependent and require an integrated approach. Indeed, to ensure sustainable development, it is necessary to address production and consumption patterns, transportation, public health, population growth, migration, social exclusion and a myriad of other complex challenges. Several speakers noted that this will require adoption of environmental practices and codes which mainstream environmental concerns into national and economic decision making. The **G77** underscored that the sustainable development challenge varies for different categories of developing countries and that all states must be accommodated in any effort at a comprehensive solution. **Maldives** underscored that access to sustainable environment is a fundamental human right and called for sustainable and *just* development.

Delegations cited concerns about deforestation, desertification, reduced air and water quality, loss of biological diversity and the depletion or irreversible damage of fragile ecosystems. The **EU** underscored that, since these environmental threats feed off each other, they cannot be tackled individually or without involving all stakeholders in the policies implemented by countries. The **G77** stated that developed countries have not implemented measures to mitigate adverse climate change as called for in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Some countries affirmed their willingness to safeguard the well-being of the planet for future generations and encouraged all states to live up to their prior commitments, including from Agenda 21 and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI). A few speakers emphasized the need to respond to the threats of climate change and biodiversity loss by pursuing more vigorous mitigation and adaptation measures, including disaster-risk reduction.

Global partnership for development

The **G77** stressed that national development strategies and mobilization of domestic resources will not be sufficient for developing countries to achieve sustainable development, particularly integrated rural development. Developing and developed countries have a mutual responsibility to meet their commitments to achieve the MDGs. **Ethiopia, on behalf of the African Group**, said benchmarks and targets to measure progress toward Goal 8 are crucial. Countries stated that efforts of developing countries to eradicate poverty and achieve economic growth in the context of sustainable development require an enabling international environment to complement national efforts. This entails an increase in the volume of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to developing countries, comprehensive initiatives for external debt relief, and concessional and preferential technology transfer. In this regard, the **G77**, along with many other developing and developed nations reiterated the imperative that countries meet their longstanding commitment to deliver 0.7% of GNI. Several donor countries reported on their progress towards and reasserted their willingness to meet commitments to step up development assistance. **The EU** reaffirmed its commitment to achieve a collective ODA target of 0.56 per cent of GNI by 2010 and 0.7 per cent by 2015, with at least half of the overall increase allocated to Africa, and emphasized that efforts are underway to improve the quality of development assistance through increased coherence and collaboration among donor countries, enhanced partnerships between donor and recipient countries and the improvement of mutual accountability mechanisms. **The EU** also stated that it would explore ways to mobilize new financial resources to tackle climate change. Some delegations stressed the need to strengthen international cooperation with middle income countries, home to half of the world's poor. The importance of South-South and triangular cooperation was also mentioned.

A few countries called for leveraging innovative sources of finance. In this respect, **the Republic of Korea** called attention to the air-ticket solidarity levy and **Tunisia** reiterated that countries should show their support to global solidarity by contributing one dollar per barrel of oil to the World Solidarity Fund, established by the General Assembly in 2002. Moreover, **the United States (US)** stressed the need to provide information and tools to people in developing countries so they can better adapt science and market knowledge to their specific circumstances. The important role of the private sector, foundations, universities and scientific institutes in generating innovative solutions to address hunger and malnutrition, as well as other development goals, was stressed. Representatives of civil society reiterated their commitment to serving as important partners to promote development and called on all stakeholders to work more closely towards shared goals.

Role of ECOSOC

It was affirmed that ECOSOC, in light of its mandate for system-wide coordination, is a central force in encouraging collaboration, promoting coherence, bringing together a wide cross-section of stakeholders and leading the UN activities in the economic and social field. Several delegations, including the **EU**, asserted that the Council should play a greater role in systematically reviewing and monitoring progress on sustainable development, while **China** emphasized the role of ECOSOC in the coordination of sustainable development efforts. **Iran** said the Council is best suited to enforcing sustainable development policy integration in the UN system. The **G77** specifically urged the Council to use its authority to encourage and promote

coordination and coherence among global macroeconomic and trade policies and the politics and actions of the international financial institutions. **The US** said ECOSOC has an important task to identify successful examples of how nations develop in sustainable ways and to share these experiences so others can adapt successful approaches to their own situations. The Council was also urged by several speakers, including the **G77**, to continue to be proactive by adapting its functions to emerging challenges, promptly addressing emerging issues and threats, as it has recently done through special meetings on the food crisis and on climate change, and exercising its coordinating responsibility. In this regard, the Council was encouraged to work more closely with the General Assembly, and other UN entities, such as the United Nations Task Force on Global Food Security Crisis.

Development Cooperation Forum and Annual Ministerial Review

Many delegations, including the **G77** and the **EU**, welcomed the full implementation of the two new functions of ECOSOC – the Annual Ministerial Review and the Development Cooperation Forum. They are considered as important mechanisms to strengthen the Council's role and foster policy dialogue among all relevant stakeholders to assess technical, financial and political barriers to the development efforts of nations. With those two features, the ECOSOC is well placed to efficiently monitor and advance the implementation of the global development agenda in line with the mandate provided by the Charter.

The **EU** noted that the AMR should allow ECOSOC to evaluate progress made in implementing the UN development agenda, building on its subsidiary bodies, particularly the Commission on Sustainable Development. Delegations welcomed the exchange of information and lessons-learned at the AMR National Voluntary Presentations. In particular, several noted the significance of the participation by developed countries this year. It was widely seen as a step forward in promoting mutual accountability in the fulfillment of international commitments in development cooperation and aid. **El Salvador** and **Moldova** announced their interest in volunteering for future presentations.

Many delegations welcomed the first DCF and expressed a strong desire to see it emerge as the main forum capable of providing the framework for dialogue on key issues of the development cooperation agenda, as well as facilitating the follow up to the Financing for Development agenda, following the Doha Conference on Financing for Development and the Accra High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness. It was also seen as being particularly well positioned for discussion on aid effectiveness at a political level, and on issues such as appropriation, harmonization, alignment, results and mutual accountability. The **EU** said that the DCF should demonstrate its value by facilitating constructive, inclusive and open debate among all development partners with a focus on two or three issues and by facilitating experience sharing so as to contribute in a concrete manner to the major development meetings to be held at the end of 2008.

Initiatives and specific proposals

- **Indonesia, Egypt** and **Chile**, proposed that the 63rd Session of the General Assembly consider the issue of food security and development as its main theme.

- **El Salvador, Brazil, Mexico and India** requested a special session of the General Assembly on the fuel crisis, and **Belarus** proposed holding a thematic debate of the General Assembly on energy efficiency, new and renewable sources of energy.
- **Belgium** proposed that 10% of ODA of donor countries should be targeted to agriculture by 2010 and that the percentage of local purchases in international food assistance be increased.
- **Japan** called attention to the establishment of the “Cool Earth Partnership,” a financial mechanism within the World Bank on the scale of \$10 billion to support developing countries’ efforts to tackle climate change.
- **Bangladesh**, on behalf of LDCs, suggested the international community may consider establishing a global food bank and an International Food Fund to ensure long-term food security for developing countries, in particular for the LDCs.
- **Brazil** announced an international conference on biofuels, to be held in Sao Paulo this coming November.