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Substantive Session

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Statement of Switzerland

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Mr. President,

Switzerland thanks the Secretary-General for his third interim report on the progress made in application of Resolution 62/208 and the associated reports; the comprehensive and transparent analysis on the funding of operational activities for development of the United Nations system for 2009 is particularly interesting.

Switzerland welcomes the modest progress that the United Nations has made in the implementation of Resolution 62/208. We feel concerned, however, that important areas have remained sluggish for years, some since the TCPR 2004.

The Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review of 2007 gives very clear guidance to the system of United Nations on quite practical issues:

First of all, it clearly states that UN funds, programmes and specialised agencies should harmonize their business practices. This is a no non-sense request, in the direct interest of the recipient countries. Despite the establishment of high-level mechanisms meant to address this issue, we haven't seen substantial progress, neither at the headquarters nor in the field. In the meantime, the cost of coordination both at HQ and in the field is apparently on the raise, indicating that we are still far away from the cooperative spirit we all have been hoping to see among the agencies. This raises a fundamental question: is the entire system too wide and complex to harmonize straightforward administrative and financial procedures?

Wouldn't it be more effective that the General Assembly uses its authority over the Funds and Programmes to demand that they harmonize without further delay their procurement, finance, human resources and ERP/IT systems, without getting further stranded in endless bureaucratic processes with twenty agencies around the table? The Funds and Programmes are moving the largest chunk of ODA flowing through the UN operational system; they are the most experienced operationally and politically. The rest of the system, most importantly the specialized agencies, could then align with them or, if not, face the risk of marginalizing themselves and losing ground financially, operationally and politically. This could in any case contribute to drastically diminish the so often referred to "cost of coordination" as it is commensurate to the reticence of partners to really cooperate.

Secondly, no significant step has been achieved so far as to strengthening the authority of the Resident Coordinator. In some countries, we can observe that the RC's leadership is recognised by the UN country team and the local authorities. But these examples are still anecdotic and fundamentally linked to positive constellations of personalities. In our view, the UN system more than ever needs to grant the RCs with legal and financial authority on the UN country team, providing them with the means to effectively coordinate it programmatically and represent it vis-à-vis the government and other development actors.

Thirdly, we are particularly concerned by the statement of the SG's report about the lack of authority and flexibility of the UN system in post-conflict and post-disaster situations. We would like to reiterate what we just said about the role of the RC: the UN system must not only be able to appoint most qualified people, but it must give them the power to discharge their responsibilities, free from bureaucratic obstacles in these extremely complex situations. In this context, as we said it last year already during the substantive session of ECOSOC, Switzerland is convinced that improved inter-agency staff mobility would help to optimise the use of existing capacities and improve the quality of programmes. Much remains to be done, particularly in crisis or post-crisis situations, to overcome the obstacles to staff mobility and rapid personnel redeployment.

On another note, we recognize that the overall structure of funding does not provide the right incentives for a better-coordinated system, thus a more effective system. The concerns raised by the Secretary General's report on the lack of core contributions are well taken. In this regard we would like to raise another question: what is the critical mass of finance required by each Fund and Programme to assure that it can perform well, that it can retain the best possible brains, and initiate relevant and effective activities in the field? This question was already addressed by the last TCPR. The international financial institutions and some of the most successful vertical funds have been using convincingly comparable approaches vis-à-vis their donors, and Switzerland doesn't understand it really that the Funds and Programmes haven't attempted to try this approach. An agreement on this critical mass could become a very important element of the upcoming QCPR.

Switzerland advocates for a pragmatic and realistic – but determined - implementation of the reform on the basis of the guidelines contained in Resolution 62/208. We are also looking forward to discover the findings of the next review, as well as the findings of the independent evaluation of the "Delivering as One" pilots. They will give us a solid ground of evidence to build the next QCPR; however, the preparation of this basis of documentation shouldn't give further reasons for bureaucratic procrastination in the implementation of measures which are in the direct interest of the aid recipients.

Thank you, Mr President.