

Thank you. I'm privileged to have been invited to participate in this panel, and I'm glad to be back at ECOSOC.

My remarks are completely my own, representing neither Harvard nor UNDP nor the U.S. Government. It has been some time since I served here, but perhaps a more distant perspective in time and place may be useful in considering ECOSOC reform in the context of the relationship of the world's current challenges and realities to social and economic development.

Reading texts establishing "The High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change" relevant to our discussion today, including its terms of reference, one is confronted by an apparent paradox. The implicit message is that the assurance of peace and security is impossible without social and economic progress but the explicit message is that the latter come last, almost as an afterthought. Economic and social issues are included in the exercise only insofar as they have a direct bearing of future threats to peace and security. But don't they always? I am not quarreling with language here, recognizing that the purpose of this particular panel is to focus on "the field of peace and security, broadly interpreted." But I am reminded of what is an endemic reality, an aching anomaly of the international system, which is that in the way we organize our efforts, the way we practice our priorities, the way we deploy our assets, development comes last on the list. Higher priority is given to the peace-keeping, political and humanitarian areas. In order to make a contribution toward better proportionality, ECOSOC must acknowledge this reality and that it does not itself have the power to change it.

In the U.N. system, ECOSOC is a beacon for the developing world and for the commitment to social and economic development as the basis of peace and security. Yet ECOSOC is relatively weak and ineffective essentially because real power exists in three other realms: (1) the political-security area, manifested in the Security Council; (2) the international financial arena, represented by the Bretton Woods institutions; and, (3) the biggest and richest nations acting as individual sovereign states, such as the U.S. Recognizing this, the question is what potential, what strategies, does ECOSOC have for pressing its special responsibilities? I would think that the answer is relatively little, but the manner in which that little is exercised can have useful impact.

Very quickly, here's my own list of the biggest realities and challenges facing us today: (1) the gap between rich and poor; (2) the proliferation of internal conflicts and failing states; (3) the inequities and dangers which accompany the benefits of globalization and interdependence; (4) terrorism and AIDs ; (5) environmental exploitation and degradation; (6) resurgent nationalism; and (7) the inadequate response to the above of the international community, meaning principally the developed nations, and among them the U.S.

In the face of these extrinsic factors and ECOSOC's limited leverage, I'm afraid my imagination fails me in the sense that my view of its reform strategy is quite conventional: it should not be too aggressive or ambitious, at least not unless and until there is a sea change in political will and enthusiasm coming from outside instead of resistance to the kind of reform it would like in support of its mandate. ECOSOC would be better to work within its limitations in a manner to make the most of its existing strength, apply it ingeniously, and prepare for the future.

I should confess that through past experience not just at the U.N. but elsewhere I've become somewhat skeptical of reform initiatives. There are drawbacks to reforming which it proves difficult to avoid. The utopian, the ideological or the nationalistic may pre-empt the productive and the pragmatic. To my mind, one example of individual national agendas undermining the larger good was when my own government, reacting to internal political pressure, campaigned aggressively and successfully under the reform banner to restrict the U.N. budget while continuing to press the U.N. to take on greater responsibilities. Sometimes reform starts with the grandiose, is compromised into the mundane, and then inflated to pretend it's more successful than it is, introducing distortion into implementation. Reform takes time and energy which has to be diverted from other pursuits, such as making what you have work as well as it can. Sometimes the frustration at not having the clout to accomplish real reform results in undue attention given to utopian flights or trivial change. Fragmentation can displace consolidation; and proliferation is the worst enemy. We know perfectly well but perhaps need to remind ourselves that a fundamental reason for things being structured the way they are and not working as well as they might are not accidental, but rather the result of ancient negotiations and stubborn vested interests.

There are several examples in reform history where needs and capacity on the development front were either short-changed or set back, even though some of these were embedded in some excellent progress for other sectors. We need reform, and steps have to be taken to achieve coherence and coordination and to strengthen capacity, but carefully, as mistakes are made and costs are paid, and frequently in the areas closest to ECOSOC's mandate. My inventory of drawbacks is not meant to scotch genuinely serious reform enterprise, rather to remind us that it is not a

siren song and to control our appetites, work diligently with what we have, be patient, and not go off in all directions. The real solutions are not within our exclusive reach, and cannot be arbitrarily or artificially forced.

Within these parameters, let me make some specific observations.

In Ambassador Rosenthal's memorandum to the members of the Council of September 10, 2003 he referred both to "ECOSOC's unique role as the central mechanism for oversight and guidance of its subsidiary bodies" and to its "classical role to promote coherence, coordination and cooperation within the different parts of the United Nations system." These are the two areas where I think ECOSOC should concentrate as it considers reform initiatives. Neither will work optimally without the specialized agencies being brought into closer working relationship with the rest of the U.N., but more progress might be made especially with the funds and programs in both respects. An extremely high priority is to figure out how to relate more coherently the economic and social work of the U.N. with the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO. This is another difficult haul. But the annual spring meeting between ECOSOC and the financial and trade institutions might be built into an influential forum in support of development, and following up the Monterrey consensus; and it should be determined whether the chiefs of the respective organizations would instruct their lieutenants to seriously negotiate revisions in the Relationship Agreements.

On a larger scale, there are the proposals for various versions of an Economic Security Council, which I feel obliged to mention, but will leave to others to discuss. There may be smaller steps which could gain way in linking the General Assembly/ECOSOC with the Security Council, perhaps in peace-building operations. More interaction between intergovernmental organizations -- such as GA/ECOSOC/Security Council Composite Committees, meetings of the Security Council with representatives of the governing boards, joint sessions of the officers of the governing boards -- may over time be fruitful. I personally favor and would be inclined to place a priority on the expansion of ECOSOC to universal membership with meetings distributed throughout the year together with the discontinuation of the GA's Second and Third Committees. The purpose of this would be to focus ECOSOC's work and most of all to reduce the overlap, duplication and mutual weakening of the two bodies which obtains today. If this could be done instead by keeping the Council's membership the same, but negotiating some circumscription of the General Assembly's involvement in the Council's principal responsibilities, then I would support that.

Sometime, somehow, the awesome question of effectively incorporating the environment into the international system has to be addressed. That does not seem to be soon; the Secretary General's 1997 suggestion that the

Trusteeship Council be reconstituted as a trusteeship for the global environment, the global commons, and sustainable development didn't fly. UNEP and the U.N. Commission for Sustainable Development need help. Perhaps the Global Environmental Facility model can be enhanced. This is an example of a "reform" that is too grandiose for action under present conditions but will come back to haunt us.

On a smaller scale, the idea of an ECOSOC Executive Committee deserves some further attention, in my opinion. Ad Hoc Advisory Groups are being tried out. My own experience leads me to believe that the one on Haiti in 1998 was neither necessary nor successful. But the African groups in Guinea-Bissau and Burundi, which you have just examined earlier this week, will provide more evidence as to the viability of this model. It would be in ECOSOC's interest for the U.N. Development Group status and activity to be strengthened along with the DGO.

Such a list of selected references to specific reforms tend to excite and discourage almost simultaneously, in a tension of need and feasibility. Again, proliferation is probable, even when there is already too much duplication, overlap and with almost everybody pursuing too many tasks at once. Effective reform requires restraint, a setting of priorities, consensus, mobilization of support, and disciplined perseverance. There is always the opportunity, of course, for progress through informal means, not structural -- through changes in attitude, behavior, practice, performance -- but this in turn would mean cultural change across the U.N. family, less competition and turf mentality, more of a commitment to the whole and reciprocated respect, which is not now the case. And such progress would require a constancy and sincerity of leadership dedicated to this culture of cooperation and mutual reinforcement from the top of all the entities and extending down into their ranks, which is not now the case.

In closing, I would like to make one last point. ECOSOC must not lose and should replenish its identity as a forum for the development and sharing of ideas, a place of intellectual ferment, and the incubation of concepts which may take time to take root. By mandate and membership it is well suited to this role, already plays it, and is in the process of improving it, but greater focus and commitment to the quality of inquiry and examination can not be abundant enough.

Thank you all.