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**Opening statement by
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PRESIDENT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL**

**HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF THE 2008 SUBSTANTIVE SESSION
OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
New York, 30 June 2008**

Honourable Ministers,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the opening of this year's ECOSOC's substantive session. We are honoured to have a number of distinguished guests here with us today.

This session of the Council is of special significance, particularly for two reasons. First, we are for the first time operationalizing all new functions of ECOSOC mandated by the 2005 World Summit. Secondly, we are meeting at a time when the world is grappling with emerging threats to the wave of prosperity and economic growth that we witnessed over the last decade or so.

In the wake of the rising price of food and fuel, the deepening credit crisis and persisting global imbalances, the declining growth of the world economy, we are facing serious threats to our efforts to lift people out of poverty growth. This crisis situation is further compounded by the challenges posed by climate change. The disruptive effects of climate change are already becoming apparent. This does not augur well for efforts to achieve the IADGs, including the MDGs.

Challenges for developing countries, particularly Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States are even more serious. There are risks of reversal of the gains made in the area of development over the last decade or so. In fact, some of the countries are

already falling behind target dates for meeting the MDGs. Rising food and fuel prices are also leading to social unrest and instability. If we do not take urgent collective action then we may face turmoil in these countries.

Threats posed by climate change are existential in nature. Many island states may cease to exist if we do not grapple with the consequences of global warming, especially rising sea levels and increase in the number and intensity of natural disasters. Fortunately, there is a growing realization that measures should be adopted both for mitigation and adaptation to ameliorate the sufferings of these poor and vulnerable countries. But this realization and awareness should be supported by concrete, concerted and collective action. I believe that negotiation on post 2012 arrangements provide an opportunity to launch such action and also enhance financing for developing countries' efforts on adaptation.

In fact, only by taking a long-term perspective can we ensure the well-being of future as well as present generations. It is now more important than ever to put into practice the concept of sustainable development, which integrates economic growth, social development, and protection of the environment.

Despite increasing awareness on long-term sustainability problems, we have yet to witness significant movements on issues such as climate change, deforestation, biodiversity and desertification. The situation in these areas continues to deteriorate as we speak. This year's Annual Ministerial Review should contribute to the latest efforts for promoting collective solutions, including strengthening governance, creating markets for sustainable development, strengthening global cooperation, increasing financial assistance and promoting transfer of technology.

I strongly believe that AMR can contribute to our efforts to generate a coherence response to these challenges of integrating the three elements of sustainable development. The current approach of pursuing development goals through sectoral approaches will never be enough to meet the threats posed by climate change. National governments as well as the UN system need to develop coherent and integrated approaches to development, which place the issue of sustainability at the center of development strategies. Given the growing constraints posed by shrinking natural resources base, it seems that if development is not sustainable, it is not attainable. I urge this session of AMR to send this message in unequivocal terms and issue a call for determined action.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assessing progress and helping to narrow the gap in implementing the United Nations development agenda is an important role entrusted to the Council. The AMR provides a central forum for all stakeholders to assess progress in overall implementation of the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs.

Linking the discussion of policy options to specific country experiences have resulted in a more hands-on debate. The National Voluntary Presentations during the AMR provide an opportunity to share an assessment of the volunteering country's progress towards the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals and explore possibilities for addressing the lags in implementation. This year's AMR is also a manifestation of the growing partnership between developed and developing countries, especially in the pursuit of MDGs. This is perhaps for the first time that in multilateral forum we have both developed and developing countries reviewing their efforts to realize the development goals in a timely manner. While they have their respective roles in this endeavour, this partnership is a key to our success in achieving these goals. I believe that both developed and developing countries have to assume their obligation in our collective pursuit of prosperity for all. This long cherished goal can only be realized through strengthened global cooperation.

I would like to congratulate governments of Belgium, Chile, United Kingdom, United Republic of Tanzania, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Luxembourg, Kazakhstan and Finland for volunteering this year. We look forward to their presentations and hope their presentations would pave the way for further strengthening the global partnership for development.

This year's AMR is also enriched by a regional perspective from West Asia. The regional consultation graciously hosted by the Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain, has produced recommendations for action on sustainable urbanization.

By systematically drawing upon regional consultations and country level assessments, the AMR will help bridge the gap between "where we ought to be" and "how much more we have to go". I am confident that the global discussions enriched by regional and national contributions will help in promoting the integration of the three elements of sustainable development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The DCF is envisioned as an inclusive United Nations Forum for ensuring coherence in development cooperation to achieve the internationally agreed development goals. At a time of growing uncertainty regarding the timely realization of the Millennium Development Goals, the DCF is uniquely placed to facilitate policy dialogue among a wide range of development actors. Therein lies its potential to be a leading venue for inclusive global dialogue and policy review on key development cooperation issues.

The Stakeholder Forum in Rome and the high-level symposiums in Vienna and Cairo engaged parliamentarians and high-level representatives from civil society and local governments in an open and interactive dialogue on their roles in contributing to effective

development cooperation. I thank the Governments of Italy, Austria and Egypt for hosting these important events.

The innovative modalities of cooperation established for the AMR and DCF have brought renewed dynamism into the implementation of development goals, by promoting greater interaction among the different constituencies. The inclusion of civil society organizations, parliamentarians as well as local government and private sector representatives is essential in sustaining the engagement and commitment of all stakeholders in bridging the implementation gap. The E-discussions, the Civil society forum and the Innovation Fair provide additional venues for all stakeholders to exchange ideas and experiences.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

ECOSOC has become much more than just a month-long meeting in New York. The substantive session is a culmination of the various activities which took place in the last six months.

Through the meeting on food crisis, the Council has shown that it can play an important role in highlighting the immediate humanitarian needs while emphasizing the need for long-term sustainable solutions. The special event on climate change in May brought together leading environment and development experts and explored the nexus between climate change and development.

These preparatory meetings coupled with the deliberation during the substantive session will lay a strong foundation for the forthcoming meetings. I see that both DCF AMR have lot to contribute to the Accra meeting on aid effectiveness and the Doha Conference on Financing for Development. These conferences can benefit from the Council's thorough work based on extensive regional consultations, global consultative forums and above all its broad-based engagement, which provides all perspectives to multilateral deliberations. I believe that Council's deliberations and debates during this session would greatly enrich discussions and outcomes of the important development related conferences and events.

The Council has shown that it is increasingly becoming better equipped to assess progress on the ground and galvanize action at national, regional and international levels.

Let us build on our hard work during the past months and continue to help countries in achieving their goals.

I count on your continued cooperation in making this a successful and fruitful session.
