



Statement by H.E. Bob Rae (Canada)

President of the Economic and Social Council

Opening of the 2025 ECOSOC Coordination Segment

6 February 2025

Mr. Vice President, Undersecretary, Excellencies, and distinguished participants.

I'm delighted to be able to join you today at the opening of the 2025 Coordination Segment of the Economic and Social Council. I would like to thank my very good friend and colleague, Ambassador Anatolio Ndong Mba of Equatorial Guinea, for guiding the preparations for this year's coordination segment. And I want to say that the words that he spoke today, I think give us a good basis from which to start.

I'd like to extend a warm welcome to the chairs of the functional commissions and the expert bodies of the council, the executive secretaries of regional commissions and the heads of U. N. system entities who are joining us today.

Excellencies, your discussions over the next couple of days will be an important opportunity for all of us. For the UN system, for member states, for stakeholders to discuss how we can ensure a more effective coordination between ECOSOC and its vast subsidiary machinery, as well as with the entire UN system – so that our collective efforts to realize the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development can be successful.

If I were giving these words at any previous or ordinary time in the life of the world or the life of the United Nations, we would say, yes, it's important to coordinate what we do, but life will go on. However, we need to understand the existential crisis which is in front of the global system. And we need to understand that it's going to require an extraordinary effort on all of our parts to ensure that the system keeps working for the billions of people who live in the world. And we need to understand that this is no ordinary time or ordinary moment, and we would be making a mistake, a complacent mistake, if we failed to really appreciate both the challenge, but also the opportunity that we have to do things better, to



do things more efficiently, to stop worrying about turf and silos. And to start worrying more about what we need to do and can do together.

I'd like to share with you a few takeaways and observations from yesterday's partnership forum to inform your discussions ahead. It was a good meeting yesterday. It was a dynamic meeting. A good discussion between experts, member states, and all those of us who've been working in this field for some time.

We all know that the SDGs are critically important. They're not complicated. Sometimes people say, you know, why do we need 17? What are they all about? And when you actually read the Sustainable Development Goals, what are they? They're just the common sense of humanity. If any of us were to ask our fellow citizens, do you think education for everyone is important? Everyone would say yes. Do you think health care for everyone is important? Yes, we would all agree. No one would disagree. And so, it's important for us to appreciate that the work we do today is not just sort of baffle gab. It's actually talking about issues that matter tremendously to the people who live in all our countries.

Today we're focusing on five SDGs. Goal number 3 – Good Health and Well-Being; Goal number 5 – Gender Equality; Goal number 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth; Goal Number 14 – Life below Water; and Goal number 17 – on the need for Partnerships. And the discussions yesterday were all about partnerships.

How do we build the partnerships that allow us to work? The partnerships between countries, between member states, the partnerships between all of the different institutions that we've built and have created over the last 100 years.

We have to create a culture of collaboration. And what does that mean? A culture of collaboration means other people need to know what you're doing. The biggest mistake we make in communication is assuming that it's already happened. Other people don't know what we're doing. We have to tell them.

We have to talk about it. We have to describe it. We have to share it. And we have to build connections that can translate into tangible results. This is a house of speeches. But what really matters to people is outcomes, is results. And that, I think, is something that the whole world is looking for. What are the results of what we're doing?



What are we achieving? What difference have we made? And it's not enough for us to say, well, this is the way we've always done it, or this is the way it's always been. We now realize and know that we have to do things differently in order to survive, in order to do the job that we're set out to do.

Yesterday we heard of many very good examples of successful partnerships. One of the things that really bugs me is when we all focus on what's wrong and we never focus on what's right and what have we done that's been good and how can we build on it. We don't motivate people by telling everybody what's wrong.

We motivate people by telling people how we can do better together. That's how we motivate people. And we have to keep on trying to do that. So there were many successful examples of partnerships which were described yesterday. For example, The Spotlight Initiative, which is a really significant initiative of the UN, which has protected over 21 million girls and women from gender based violence.

The Global Ghost Gear Initiative, engaging over 130 stakeholders to tackle abandoned fishing gear to reduce marine pollution. The infrastructure for resilient island states, known as IRIS, which is now carrying out 50 projects to strengthen infrastructure and resilience against climate and disaster risks.

And I would give you one example. Bangladesh. Bangladesh has reduced dramatically the number of people killed during deadly cyclones. And they've done that by building up an infrastructure that will in fact allow people to live and survive. And that's just one example where we can in fact make a difference in saving lives if we do things together.

The Great Blue Wall Initiative. An effort to protect 2 million square kilometers of marine areas, restore 2 million hectares of ecosystems, create 2 million blue jobs, and sequester 100 million tons of CO2 by 2030. Those are just some examples that we heard. There are many, many others. But we need to spend as much time celebrating where we have succeeded as we do bemoaning our failures.

We have all failed. Me included. But we all have to learn how to get up again and figure out how to fix things and do it right and do it better. Last night, as, as we were concluding, the Partnership Forum, I made the point of quoting from the Charter, and I'm going to do it again because sometimes the charter comes under attack and sometimes the very notion of multilateralism is threatened.



And we have to understand what the Charter actually says. Article 55, Chapter 9 of the Charter, the chapter entitled International Economic and Social Cooperation. Let's remember that the people who created the United Nations in 1945, they were living not only with war, not only with the most violent event in modern history, they were dealing with what had taken place before the war, where there were massive depressions, huge tariff walls, which drove up economic protectionism and led to aggression and conflict as a result of the poverty that was created by those policies.

And so the vision that they had for this organization was not just a political vision. It was also an economic and social vision. And it's important to understand what it says. It says with a view to creating conditions of stability and well being, which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self determination of peoples the United Nations shall promote:

- higher standards of living, full employment and conditions of economic and social progress and development;
- solutions of international economic, social, health and related problems; and international cultural and educational cooperation; and
- universal respect for and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.

And the next article says, all members pledge themselves to take joint and separate action in cooperation with the organization for the achievement of the purposes set out in Article 55.

And I read this to you because every once in a while, we need to recommit ourselves. Well, for our part as Canadians, we make that pledge every day. We understand that a commitment to a multilateral organization like the United Nations is good for our country. It advances the interests of our nation to participate and work with other nations. It does not take away from our sovereignty or our freedom. In fact, it broadens our sovereignty and our freedom. The United Nations for Canada is sovereignty and freedom plus. Because by working and joining with all of you, we commit ourselves to what it is that we owe each other. That was the commitment that we made in 1945, when we, together



with a number of other countries, signed the Charter of the United Nations in San Francisco in May 1945.

And it's important for us to recommit ourselves to that every day. And it is a great honor for me to serve as the President of this Council for this brief period. My life extends a little shorter than a butterfly. But we have to try to make that difference in the work that we do.

And we have to take account of the realities of the world around us. And we're doing that all the time. Thank you very much. I wish you fruitful discussions I thank the.