



Opening Statement by H.E. Bob Rae (Canada)

President of the Economic and Social Council

2025 ECOSOC Meeting on the Transition from Relief to Development

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Thank you very much, Krzysztof and Maritza.

Colleagues and friends,

This is my second opportunity to speak in this magnificent hall, for which we're grateful for the Government of Qatar for having allowed it to be rebuilt. It's wonderful to be able to join all of you.

I'm going to try and put some of the statistics and data in a bit of perspective. Let's not forget that we are a planet of about 8 billion people. Our global economy generates about \$100 trillion in GDP every year. That number is growing. It's not shrinking, it's growing.

It is at the same time important for us to remember that the number of people that have been pulled out of poverty and pulled out of underdevelopment over the last 25 years is extraordinary. And so, when we look at the situation at the moment, we have to make a fundamental calculation which is not only factual, but also a moral calculation, and that is are we talking about a glass that is half full or a glass that is half empty.

It is important for us to bear in mind at every moment that the economic and social health of the planet depends on a number of things. It depends on a balance between growth and equity, it depends on a balance between growth for today with the question of sustainability for the future, and it's based as well on a balance between how are we doing with respect to the battle against profound and deep inequality in some societies? We shouldn't feel that the objective is impossible to achieve, and we shouldn't feel that there is nothing much we can do about where we are today. But we certainly should feel that there is much work still to be done and also understand that this particular moment in time, there is a dangerous decline among a great many countries and too much public opinion about the importance of the principle of global solidarity. And that is the real challenge that we face right now. It's not a challenge of technology, it's not a challenge of capability, it's a challenge of will. It doesn't mean it's easier, but it does mean that we should put ourselves in the position of throwing our hands up and saying there's nothing much we can do about this because it is so deep and so widespread.



The answer is, yes, it's too widespread but it's also important to understand that there are ways in which we can provide assistance that is broad-based and at the same time targeted that will deal with the question in front of us.

Krzysztof and Maritza, my two colleagues, have both presented an approach that I strongly support. We need to have multilateralism that is strengthened, that is to say, support between governments that is strengthened. But we also need to understand that the real economy in the world is not just about governments. The real economy is about financing, it's about our financial institutions, it's about our companies and our businesses large and small, it's about the partnerships that drive real development and it's about how to harness all of these partnerships in achieving success.

It's also about not forgetting the fundamentals of the UN development system and humanitarian system, which is, as Maritza has described, this ever-important concept of the nexus. Peace and security. Human development. And human rights. And these things go together. And Geneva is the home of this very critical part of the entire UN system. And I want to reinforce the importance of the work that's done in Geneva and how integral the work that is done and coordinated out of Geneva is to the global system. The one thing the present crisis has forced us to do, and the one thing that UN80 is forcing us to do, is to understand what is the UN system, how does it function, can it function better, and frankly is it enough of a system?

I'll just tell an anecdote from driving into one entrance to the wonderful grounds of the Palais. I was told that that badge that I had wouldn't work at that entrance, it would only work at another entrance. And I'm wondering "really?" can we not create one badge for the whole UN that works wherever we go whether you come to New York, or whether you come to Geneva, or whichever door you come into. There should be simpler ways of doing things. But that's just a metaphor for our challenge and for the challenge of understanding that, as important as the Charter is, the Charter institutions are, like ECOSOC, it's also for us to understand that none of us can work well unless we work in partnership with others.

We've had a busy year in ECOSOC this year, as we should, because we need to be in the face of the challenges that we face. We think that we're well-positioned to provide policy guidance on the nexus between humanitarian action, development and peace, aiming to address increasingly complex and protracted crises.

We had excellent meetings, neither one is going to take credit for this, but Krzysztof's meetings that he held were very important on the development segment, the operational activities, which clearly showed how integrated the system needs to become and how it is a notion of



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interdependence between peace and security and development and human rights that can actually demonstrate where that works in every context. If we don't have a confidence in civil rights, if we don't have confidence in the rule of law, if we don't have confidence in how things need to work together effectively, we don't have development. And if we don't have development, it's a circle. The interdependence is entirely circular. It's not that one pillar is more important than the other. All the pillars are equally important.

Ce n'est pas une question de quel pilier est plus important que les autres. Il ne faut jamais oublier l'importance des systèmes légaux, des systèmes des droits, l'assurance que les citoyens ont dans leur système de sécurité personnelle qui, dans beaucoup de pays, n'existent pas, n'existent pas suffisamment. Et d'autre part, les investissements venant à la fois des gouvernements, mais plus important, des banques et du secteur privé pour garantir qu'il y a une croissance continue et une prospérité plus grande. Le concept de durabilité est absolument primordial, non seulement pour l'environnement mais pour toutes nos activités sociales et économiques.

This meeting that we're holding today is actually one that we've held over the last several years on this concept on the Transition from Relief to Development. It provides us with a distinctive space in our meetings to really talk about something that is exceptionally important.

We make a fundamental principal of the divide between humanitarian and development and it's sometimes almost a joke to me to listen to humanitarians and development people talk to each other as if they're living in different universes. But the reality is that we work together, and that we have to work together. And we can't separate out the needs that exist in one system from the needs that exist in the other because it's not a simple division. But we also have to recognize that as we go through the current crisis we have to focus attention on those who are in the greatest and most urgent need. Our goal is to stop people from starving and prevent people from starving. Our goal is to stop people from dying when they don't need to die and to make sure that we're getting attention and care to the people who need it most. But our goal is also to understand that it never should be our intention to simply keep humanitarian assistance bubbling along.

When we went through out first-grade refugee crisis after the first World War and the second World War what is remarkable is the speed with which we went from having a large number of places where people were gathered, internally or because of peaceful passing from border to border, and how quickly they were able to be moved and integrated to the point where there was a debate in the 1960s as to whether UNHCR and IOM really needed to exist anymore. Well, here we are. We know how severe these crises have become, how long they are lasting, and



the length of time that people are staying in crisis situations not being able to integrate into economies, not being able to integrate into local communities, not being able to find jobs, not being able to join the marketplace, not being able to do what it is that in healthy societies and healthy economies people are able to do.

And so, we have to keep working with communities and we're going to be having these Special Meetings where we try to learn from local experience and see how can we do – is there a model that works better than others? Can we take some of the models that are working more effectively and apply them to others?

We have to admit that the statement that we make “we must not leave anyone behind” – the reality is, right now, we are leaving people behind. We're leaving many people who are disabled behind, we're leaving older people behind, we're leaving people behind who can't get to school, kids who can't learn. We are, in fact, leaving a lot of people behind. And we also know that the funding crisis is very, very real. We can't carry on with plans that don't take into account the resources that we need, strategy without resources is better called hallucination. We don't need speeches full of hallucination. We need speeches that are practical and pragmatic and deal with the real problem that we face.

Coming up, we're concluding the review of the peacebuilding architecture. There will be an upcoming review of ECOSOC and the high-level political forum on sustainable development. It's going to be looking at what more we need to do, and above all, the UN80 process is one that has to be integrated into all of our thinking about how we're going to move forward.

We have many opportunities to meet, but the most important thing is that we need opportunities to push forward and to push forward successfully.

Let me just repeat one last point. There are too many siloes in the United Nations at the moment. There are too many parts of the system that are not talking to each other and we have to continue to find the ways to break those down and to fit what it is we can do to fit that more into our actual capacities that are actually present. It's not a pleasant or easy process. It's a tough process.

Mais il est absolument essentiel pour le bien-être non seulement de l'ONU mais pour le bien-être du public et de ceux qui dépendent beaucoup sur un système de l'ONU qui marche, qui marche mieux.



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Je vous remercie beaucoup pour l'opportunité de vous parler. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak today.

Thank you.