



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

President of the Economic and Social Council

2026 Organizational Session and Bureau Election

31 July 2025

Good morning, everyone.

It's my pleasure to declare open the 2026 session of the Economic and Social Council, and I'm very pleased to call to order its first meeting.

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

This is what we call a day of transition, and I'm very honoured to hand over the Presidency of the Economic and Social Council to my successor, who will be introduced in a moment. But I hope you will forgive me if, before I give up the gavel, you will permit me to say a few parting words.

None of you will be surprised that I don't actually have a text of what I'm about to say.



There are two things I want to say. The first is to repeat what I've been able to do in the past week, and that is to thank most sincerely, first of all, all of you — Member States, members of ECOSOC, and members of the General Assembly — for the support, advice, and participation that you have shared with me this past year.

When I took on this job last summer, Paula Narváez, the Ambassador from Chile who was my predecessor, warned me that it was more work than I might think — and she was right. It's a lot of work. It's been a lot of very engaged travel, speaking, meeting, debating, drafting, and then traveling, meeting, debating, drafting again. It's been an exceptionally busy time. But I also think it's been very, very worthwhile.

In addition to thanking all of you, I want to thank Emer, who is my left hand here — the Secretary who, for those of you who are new, you will see whispering in the ear of the new President to help us get through the details of every meeting, the wrangling over votes, points of order, and all the other challenges that take place. She's tremendous.



On my right is USG Junhua Li, who is such a source of wisdom and leadership not only in UN DESA but also in the Secretariat as we go through a challenging time at the UN.

Behind me are staff members — particularly I want to single out Lotta, who is my chief advisor in all of our executive meetings and planning all the sessions, very ably supported by a remarkable team. And of course, I have my own team to thank in the Canadian Mission, to whom I'm very grateful for the work they've been able to do.

Sitting here in the Canada chair is my wife, and I'm sure you'll understand that none of us do these things without the advice of our partners and our main advisors — and certainly that is true in my case.

The second thing I want to say — and I can sum this up in really a couple of words — is that we hear a lot in the UN discourse about how things are broken, how things have fallen apart, how things are unhinged. And I don't disagree with any of those diagnoses.



But with great respect to the journalistic profession, or to the professional consultant profession, or to other professions — doctors, medical profession — my job is not to diagnose a problem only. Our job, our belief — and this is particularly true in ECOSOC — our job is to fix, to repair, to mend, to allow things to heal, and to make change happen.

It's so critical for us to realize that that's our responsibility. Our job is not to give speeches saying how terrible things are; our job is to roll up our sleeves and fix things, make them better, improve them.

There are so many sources of conflict and disruption in the world today. We are at such a point of difficulty and crisis and deep hardship and anguish and pain that we have to understand: our job is, yes, to give that voice and allow it to be heard — but it's also to fix things, to mend things, and to make them better.

And no agency and no body in the UN has more of a responsibility to do that than the Economic and Social Council. Because when you look at the structure of the Charter, at the beginning, the Charter describes the broad context of the work we do — the work of the General Assembly, the work of the



Security Council — and later in the document, the Economic and Social Council is given its place. But we are a Charter body, and we do have responsibilities under the Charter.

So I think we have to take those responsibilities seriously. We have to see how we can make the work we do meaningful. We can't become the victims of rote and repetition and a schedule that simply descends upon us, and we then go through a series of meetings and encounters and ask ourselves, "Why are we doing this?" And we say, "Well, because it's in the schedule."

It's not enough to do that. We have to ask: What are we trying to fix?

So what we've tried to do in the last year is to look at problems we think we can contribute to. Some of them — in particular around issues like displacement, the disruptive but potentially very beneficial and exciting role of AI, the crisis in Haiti — we've tried to keep front and center, when very few other places are spending time and attention the way they should.

We've also looked at overall economic and financial developments in the UN system — in particular, the



opportunities we've had with FfD4. I take this opportunity to salute my good friend Héctor from Spain, who will be joining the Bureau, and thank Spain and their leadership, and the leadership of all the co-facilitators who took us through the FfD4 process successfully to a conclusion. UN DESA played a key role.

I think this Council helped. I think the work we did to repair, rebuild, and fix the relationship between the United Nations and the financial institutions in Washington has helped contribute to a solution. It's not enough to decry the fact that the international financial architecture is not working as well as we would like. We have to repair the relationship. We have to rebuild the relationship. We have to fix the relationship. That's our job. I believe that's the job of all of us at the UN.

We'll see in the Summit that's forthcoming the extent to which we can build on the success of FfD4 and take us even further down what is going to be a successful road.

I commend to all of you the idea that we should see ourselves as builders. We should see ourselves as people who repair and fix and advance and make things better. While we are all aware of the need for broader vision and a deeper sense of strategy,



we also need a profound sense of pragmatism — what works, how can we make progress, how can we make it better?

I think in the last week, frankly, we've seen people say the UN is irrelevant, it doesn't matter, the UN is not a power player, the UN is not where the action is. By the way, this is not a new sentiment — it was said right after the UN was founded in 1945. I'm sure someone in the first meeting said, "Well, this isn't where the action is."

The action is where you take it and where you make it. And I think we've shown this last week — and I congratulate our friends from France and Saudi Arabia who have helped turn the General Assembly and the UN to the center of what is a critically important debate in the area not only of peace and security but also of economic and social development, which is the area of the whole Middle East.

So I'll leave that with you. It's been a great privilege to serve as your President, and I look forward to supporting our new President.

And with that—



Je veux dire merci beaucoup pour tout l'appui que vous m'avez donné, pour le travail que nous avons pu faire ensemble, et pour l'assurance que notre travail continue. C'est important de reconnaître que les choses ont un commencement et une fin — il y a une conclusion à notre travail, mais la porte s'ouvre encore une fois. Nous voyons, avec un nouveau président, une nouvelle équipe, un nouveau bureau, de nouveaux défis — et voilà. C'est comme ça que tournent le monde et ces affaires.

Merci beaucoup. Thank you all very much.