

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

REMARKS TO THE ECOSOC OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES SEGMENT

19 May 2020

[as delivered]

Madam President, Mr. Vice President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.
May I first of all say how happy I am to participate in this meeting.

I've always believed that we would not be able to have a reform of the UN development system fully in line with the objectives of the organization without the strong participation of the membership in the oversight and in the process of accountability.

I always believed that the other side of reform is the relevance of ECOSOC and we need ECOSOC -- the role of the operational activity segment that I always believed could be an instrument to guarantee that Member States would have a real possibility of oversight and the guarantee of accountability, in relation to the reform process, and all the other aspects that the Quadrennial comprehensive program review includes, so I am delighted to have this opportunity.

I also would like to thank all those that made it possible to be here, as I am today, presenting the number of things that have happened.

The leadership of the Deputy Secretary-General that has been absolutely crucial in all this process, all the different departments of the Secretariat, all our country teams, the different agencies, and of course, the guidance, the support, the contributions of Member States that were extremely important to allow us to meet today where we are.

So, my deep gratitude to all of them. And now, allow me, Madam President, to deliver my report to the Operational Activity Segment.

We gather as COVID-19 continues to wreak havoc across the globe and expose the fragilities of our world — with the most vulnerable suffering the most.

The task of eradicating poverty and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals has never been more challenging, more urgent and more necessary.

This Operational Activities Segment will help shape our ability to respond together.

Our reforms I deeply believe have put us on the right footing.

Together, we have created a new coordination system for development.

We have transformed our structures, tools, funding and mindsets to better advance the 2030 Agenda.

Our Country Teams – under the independent leadership of Resident Coordinators – are making a greater impact supporting Member States where it matters most – in the lives of people.

And thanks to a renewed spirit of collaboration, the UN system is working together more effectively across all dimensions of sustainable development.

Our objective remains clear: to help countries navigate and accelerate progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, fully respecting the principle of national ownership.

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised the bar even higher.

We now have a triple imperative.

First, to respond urgently to help countries stem the impact of the pandemic and suppress the transmission of the virus.

Second, to help governments and their people safeguard development gains, mitigate the pandemic's socio-economic impacts, and protect lives in emergency settings.

Third, to work with partners to ensure that the national, regional and global recovery efforts follow the 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Resident Coordinators who play a critical role in bringing together UN assets — working with the WHO as they lead the health response, UNDP on socio-economic support involving all Country Team members, and Regional Economic Commissions on debt, trade and other macroeconomic dimensions.

Excellencies,

My report on implementation of the 2016 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review cycle is the fruit of rigorous monitoring of the situation on the ground, and constructive engagement with Member States and the UN development system.

I thank you for your continuous leadership.

Looking ahead, I would highlight three points.

First, we are on track in implementing the change measures mandated by the General Assembly in the 2016 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review and the 2018 resolution on the repositioning of the UN development system. I thank colleagues across the system that have helped make that possible.

A new generation of UN Country Teams is taking shape, better adapted to country needs and better able to harness the expertise throughout the system.

New Cooperation Frameworks are based on more integrated, coherent and effective support to governments and their people.

And business operations are becoming evermore efficient, with an emphasis on transparency and accountability.

Member States have better visibility over the work and the resources of the system, including the Resident Coordinator system. And we are improving results-based planning, monitoring, evaluation and audit functions.

The Resident Coordinator is being recognized as the empowered and impartial leader of the UN development system at country level.

According to independent surveys, two-thirds of programme country governments found Resident Coordinators showing increased capacity to support national development priorities.

Almost 80 per cent of host governments identified the newly reformed UN development system as more relevant to their country's development needs.

And three-quarters of Resident Coordinators report far greater ability to draw on normative and technical expertise and resources across the UN development system, including in specialized agencies and organizations with a limited country footprint.

Step by step, we are building an even stronger and more diverse cadre of Resident Coordinators.

Since the transition to a reinvigorated system in January 2019, we have ensured full gender parity amongst Resident Coordinators, and we have significantly improved geographic diversity.

Following a new round of appointments last week, that still have to be confirmed by Member States and according to their acceptance, the proportion of Resident Coordinators from the Global South has reached 50 per cent - a 20 per cent increase from just two years ago.

We are on the right track. But, as my report underscores, we are not there yet.

We must, for instance, move forward rapidly with the outstanding dimensions of the Management and Accountability Framework for UN country teams; continue to push ahead with the challenging but necessary work on efficiencies; advance our efforts to diversify the profiles and skillsets of Resident Coordinators and their offices; put a spotlight on our work to scale up partnerships; and find ways to meet the funding needs of the Resident Coordinator system.

Excellencies,

The second area to highlight is the urgent need to conclude all remaining mandates.

A year has passed since you first reviewed my proposals to reinvigorate our regional architecture and overall approach to multi-country offices.

This period has seen deep reflection and consultation on each aspect of my proposals – even if the lack of consistent data and insufficient coordination in today’s regional architecture has created additional complexity.

After a year of productive consultation, the time has come to move forward.

COVID-19 is a reminder that we have no time to lose.

The regional level remains an under-utilized asset of the UN system.

I am sharing tailored proposals for a better organized, more collaborative UN development system at regional level — one that is more able to tackle cross-border challenges and leverage regional policy expertise for SDG results.

We have also made significant progress in proposals for Multi Country Offices.

The needs and priorities of Small Island Developing States could not be more pressing as we work to tackle the climate crisis.

The detailed plan before you will ensure we boost our efforts across the social, economic and environmental dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals.

We will also strengthen the system-wide evaluation function. I welcome your feedback on the system-wide strategic document submitted last year by the UN Sustainable Development Group and your guidance to look ahead.

The next Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review is an opportunity to focus on critical policy issues that require special attention by the UN development system.

The next Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review can look deeply into how the UN development system can ensure accelerated efforts as we embark on the Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals — and help governments recover better from the pandemic.

We must continue to step up cooperation in core areas where the interlinkages are strongest and our impact the greatest.

Climate change. Gender equality. Economic transformation and employment. And rooting out poverty and leaving no one behind.

Partnerships — including south-south cooperation — will also be pivotal, as will support to countries in special situations; including those experiencing fragility and crisis.

Excellencies,

In the space of a single Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review, we have deeply transformed the UN development system.

And we have done so in time to ensure we can better support countries as the world faces the greatest global human crisis in generations.

You can count on my determination – and the full commitment of all members of the UN Sustainable Development Group – to continue to honour your trust.

We count on you to continue to assume ownership over the new UN development system; provide guidance; and hold us accountable along the way.

Your voice and support in the ECOSOC, in every governing body, and in your relationship with individual agencies, will continue to guide success.

Your contributions to the new Resident Coordinator system and other critical areas of the Funding Compact will determine the long-term sustainability of the system we have built together.

Nearly 40 countries have supported this effort to date. I am grateful to every single one of them and urge your continued support.

I also count on others to step up at a time when the UN development system relies on a strong coordination backbone.

Working together - with our foot on the pedal and our eyes on the 2030 Agenda - we will get through this crisis and reach our destination — protecting hard-won development progress and accelerating our joint efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in this Decade of Action.

I look forward to listening to your perspectives and expectations on the way ahead.

Thank you for your commitment and your support.