

ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment
President of the Economic and Social Council

Opening Remarks

(Tuesday, 18 May 2021, 10:10 AM – 12:00 PM)

Excellencies,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to the 2021 Operational Activities for Development Segment of ECOSOC.

2. I am very pleased to welcome the Secretary-General to our meeting.

3. It is encouraging to see that so many participants joined us from different parts of the world.

4. This is a testament of the importance we all accord to the work of the United Nations in supporting development.

5. The main objective of this year's operational activities segment of ECOSOC will be to review the functioning of the reformed UN Development Cooperation structure.

6. Our sessions over the next 3 days will consider the Secretary-General's report on the Development Cooperation Office and the new resident coordinator system. It will involve a dialogue with programme country governments, resident coordinators and UN country team members as well as with the Executive Heads of the UN development system. It will also review where we are two years after the adoption of the Funding Compact.

7. The purpose of our discussion is, of course, to determine how well the UN development system is responding to the needs and priorities of the countries it is designed to help in their national development processes. We look forward to the contributions of the resident coordinators, as well as from the regional organizations which are important elements of the UN Development System. Last, but not least, we will review how the UN system can improve and enhance its partnership with the international financial institutions which have coterminous mandates, larger resources and specialized expertise in several areas of the multi-dimensional challenges of development.

Excellencies,

8. In the past year, the UN development system has been put to the ultimate “stress test”. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a particularly devastating impact

on the developing countries serviced by the UN development system; with health systems stretched and shattered; lives and livelihoods devastated; revenues eviscerated; large debt liabilities and little fiscal space to recover from the pandemic and keep their economies afloat.

9. It must be said that, even as developing countries struggled, the UN development system responded with alacrity and coherence to the crisis. Assessment of country needs were quickly prepared, enabling the Secretary-General to launch his appeal for emergency help to the most seriously affected developing countries. The preparations of national response programmes were coordinated with and often by Resident Coordinators. This coordination encompassed the IMF and the World Bank and other UN agencies and organizations, including the country offices of WHO, UNDP, UNICEF and others.

10. I believe that in this emergency, the system worked such as it was meant to work. This emergency experience provides a solid basis for the permanent enhancement of the effectiveness of the UN development cooperation system and its partnership with governments, other international organizations, civil society and other development actors.

11. I believe valuable lessons have been learnt from this searing experience. The Development system works when the objectives to be achieved are clear and nationally driven and determined; when all actors are cooperating to realize such clear objectives; when there is timely response and support from head offices; when there is adequate and timely finance available to respond to the identified objectives.

12. As highlighted in the Secretary-General's report, the new Resident Coordinator system is now firmly in

place with new independence and stronger leadership. The General Assembly has recognized that progress has been made in making the UN development system more coherent, impactful and efficient. The resolution on the 2020 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR), provided strategic direction to guide the United Nations development system in its important work for the next four years. It asked the UN development system to support integrated policies to realize the SDGs and to help countries to leave no one behind. It identified specific policy areas such as poverty eradication, quality education, social protection, climate change, urgent and equitable rollout of vaccines, and universal health coverage.

13. The Secretary-General's report outlines the achievements but also the challenges and remaining weaknesses in the reform of the UN development system. The report shares the Secretary-General's

vision for responding to the 2020 QCPR with the same determination that characterized the system's response to COVID-19. He has outlined the need to support countries in special situation and address vulnerabilities. He has emphasized the importance of partnerships and the need for cooperation with international financial institutions. He has highlighted the areas where greater efforts are needed and where the rules, regulations, practices and work culture have not kept pace with the shift towards a system that works as one.

14. The reformed UN Development System is working. However, the challenges ahead are imposing. A decade of development gains have been wiped out in most developing countries. They must now focus even more on eradicating poverty and hunger; on building social safety nets for the poor and the most vulnerable; on mobilizing the financing required to respond to the pandemic and to build

back towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. They have to generate public and private investment in sustainable infrastructure; revive old and build new supply chains; expand exports and resist protectionist trends; diversify their economies and generate additional revenues.

15. Mr. Secretary-General, I would now like to hand over the floor to you to present your report and your vision on the way forward.
