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**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

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**Remarks**  
**Economic and Social Council**  
**Operational Activities for Development Segment**  
**Closing Session**

**Virtual Format**  
**Wednesday, 27 May 2020**

Your Excellency, Mr. Juan Sandoval Mendiola, Vice-President of ECOSOC,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Colleagues.

I am honoured to join you for the closing of this year's ECOSOC Operational Activities for Development Segment.

This first ever virtual Operational Activities segment is a testament to the dedication and perseverance of Member States and the UN development system. I congratulate the President of ECOSOC, Ambassador Mona Juul, and our Chair, Ambassador Juan Sandoval and his team, for their commitment and for convening these meetings despite complicated circumstances.

This year's segment is particularly important. It starts the preparations for the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of UN system operational activities (QCPR) that the General Assembly will conduct later this year.

We meet as the COVID-19 pandemic is wreaking havoc across the globe. Early indicators suggest that it now poses a major risk to the SDGs and threatens achievements already made. The most vulnerable people and the poorest countries will undoubtedly suffer the most, and recover last.

Through our response to the pandemic, we must protect hard won advances. And we must put in place the kind of systems and policies that will allow us to reach the ambitious goals we have set for ourselves.

This spirit of "rebuilding better" guides the support extended by the UNSDG and UN country teams, to countries' response to the pandemic. Many of you expressed appreciation for these efforts. You saw them as the first test for the historical reforms launched by the General Assembly in 2018.

The Deputy Secretary-General summed up the key messages from the segment. A key message I take from the discussions, is your tremendous support to the work of the UN development system. You trust that it has been moving swiftly in implementing the reforms you

mandated and repositioning itself to help countries achieve the SDGs, and battle the COVID-19 pandemic.

We discussed the challenges that remain at the country, regional and global levels. We need continuing work to ensure that the leadership and prerogatives of the resident coordinators are fully reflected in the behaviours of the UN system, and in all individual entities' guidance to their country representatives. As we step up the elaboration of new Cooperation Frameworks, reflecting countries' priorities, we must fully use this process to reconfigure UN country teams. Continuing efforts are also needed to deepen efficiency and accountability, and ensure sustainable funding of the resident coordinator system. We look forward to your feedback on the Secretary-General's recommendations on regional assets and on multi-country offices. The draft resolution that the G77 and China will present will be of critical importance in this regard.

We also heard broad agreement that, while supporting the response to COVID-19, the system must stay the course on repositioning its support to development. We should build on today's political will and momentum to continue to forge ahead with the reforms.

The segment also provided important messages for the 2020 QCPR. I would like to briefly elaborate on those.

You underscored the principle of national ownership and leadership which is at the heart of UN system development cooperation. We heard loud and clear your support to the system's focus on poverty eradication, as the greatest challenge to the international community. During the 2020 QCPR, it will be important to strengthen further the work of the United Nations in this area – such as on ensuring social protection and access to quality public services, and on reaching the furthest behind.

I sensed that there is also support to the Secretary-General's recommendation that the 2020 QCPR goes beyond providing guidance to the UN development system on *how* it should work. It should also address the kind of integrated policy support that Member States expect in order to accelerate implementation of the SDGs.

The resident coordinators and country teams are already using the Common Country Analysis (CCA) and the new Cooperation Frameworks to mobilize the expertise of entities, regardless of their country presence. This "whole of system" approach is essential to support integrated policies that address the synergies and trade-offs among the SDGs. Cooperation must be increased in areas such as integrated food systems or the other entry points identified in the Global Sustainable Development Report.

We also heard that programme countries seek the assistance of the United Nations in areas such as growth and employment or climate change, where it has been less present in the past. During the new QCPR cycle, the system needs to adjust its offers to respond to this demand.

You underscored the importance of cooperation between the UN development system and international financial institutions. Your further guidance on this topic may be a new frontier for consideration under the coming QCPR cycle.

You also highlighted that the UN development system should accelerate further its efforts to provide differentiated responses to the varied needs, priorities and capacities of countries. Tailoring UN support has been a core objective of the reforms. It is at the heart of the new Cooperation Framework. We expect that the proposals on Multi-country Offices will improve the system's support to SIDS. The Secretary-General has taken steps to ensure that

LDCs are prioritized in all programming and budgeting, ahead of the next Conference on LDCs. Some delegations also asked that the QCPR supports the implementation of the Vienna programme of action on land-locked developing countries. It will also be critical to deepen the reflection on how the UN development system can best respond to the needs of middle-income countries.

During these few days, we heard repeated calls for reviewing the principles for allocating financial resources and assistance to countries. Vulnerability should be taken into account along with GDP.

Overall, we need to accelerate the shift from a traditional model of direct support and service provision, towards high-quality integrated policy advice, capacity development and support for leveraging partnerships and financing.

The QCPR can indeed validate and guide the efforts to help countries mobilize partnerships to advance progress towards the SDGs. We need to ensure common approaches to partnerships within the UN country teams. Likewise, we hope that the new system-wide strategy for South-South cooperation will galvanize more coordinated and strategic actions in this area.

The 2020 QCPR can also encourage to strengthen UN country teams' support to the voluntary national reviews conducted at the HLPF. The analysis and the follow-up to the VNRs should feed into the CCA and the Cooperation Framework.

This is one way to promote stronger and more coherent linkages between the work of the UN system at country, regional and global levels. This is a recommendation you also reiterated, which can be further detailed during the 2020 QCPR. DESA is ready to play its part, offering its analytical and intergovernmental work.

You also called for improving further the focus on gender equality, a priority of the Secretary-General. Likewise, some of you underscored the need to better connect actions in the development, humanitarian and sustaining peace area. Member States can help mobilize more holistic support by addressing the largely separate funding streams for development, humanitarian, peace and environment, which impede complementary actions.

The Secretary-General's report provides next steps and proposals on those various topics which can inspire the preparations for the QCPR.

Overall, this operational activities Segment demonstrates the importance you attach to the QCPR and the multiple ideas and views you bring to the review.

As our Chair said, during this segment, you have been setting the tone for the future. You have been shaping ECOSOC as a platform for holding the UN development system accountable, and ensuring that its operational activities improve people's lives.

DESA stands ready to support your deliberations as you prepare the 2020 QCPR.

I thank you.

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