

**Opening Remarks by H.E. Collen Vixen Kelapile,
President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**

Commission for Social Development

Opening Session

Monday 7 February 2022

**Your Excellency, María del Carmen Squeff, Chair of the
Commission for Social Development,**

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

- 1.** It gives me great pleasure to join you at the opening of the ***60th Session of the Commission for Social Development*** - a very important subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).
- 2.** We are once again meeting in the shadows of the COVID-19 pandemic. With so little time left to realize the vision of the 2030 Agenda for

Sustainable development, the pandemic has hindered or even reversed progress on many Sustainable Development Goals.

- 3.** Its impact has been particularly severe on the Goals to eradicate poverty and hunger by 2030. According to some estimates, the social and economic impacts of this pandemic have been four times greater than those of the 2008-2009 crisis.
- 4.** The economic recovery we have embarked on to date has proved to be fragile in the face of new variants of the virus or changes in macro-economic policies. It has also proved highly uneven.
- 5.** Developing countries in particular and especially in Africa are being left behind, with slower economic growth and highly unequal access to the vaccines and the financial resources to support their recovery.
- 6.** We are experiencing an increasingly divided world, measured also by the unequal access to the technological means to aid our response and recovery. The poorest countries and people are getting poorer. Women face growing violence and inequalities. Job losses and disruptions in education hinder learning opportunities and youth empowerment.

Ladies and Gentleman,

- 7.** The most vulnerable among us -- the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States -- are shouldering the worst of the burden in these challenging times.

- 8.** The pandemic has also shown that in times of a crisis the most destitute suffer the most, and ***it has highlighted that we must strengthen multilateralism and international cooperation.***
- 9.** We must therefore learn key lessons and act in a spirit of global solidarity, if we are to move forward our 2030 Agenda. We must take collective actions to recover better and build a fairer and more sustainable world.
- 10.** There is broad agreement among Member States and stakeholders -- including civil society -- that our response to the pandemic must be guided by the 2030 Agenda. Our policies must encompass measures to realize the SDGs.
- 11.** The policies must be transformative and promote the structural changes we need to ensure that our economic, social and financial systems support equality, inclusiveness and sustainability. They must be faithful to our commitment to leave no one behind in our implementation of the global development goals.
- 12.** The annual theme of ECOSOC and the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) is precisely about ***"Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"***.
- 13.** The Commission for Social Development has an essential role to play, in developing policy guidance towards this objective. I see it as the home

for pursuing SDG 10 on reducing inequality. It is the platform to advance innovative social policies, which proved to be among the most important during this pandemic.

- 14.** We saw the critical role of stronger and resilient social protection systems, in sheltering people from the impacts of the crisis and preventing them falling deeper into poverty, hunger and food insecurity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- 15.** It is quiet unfortunate for me to say that according to studies, many of the emergency social protection measures implemented during the worst of the economic disruption are already being withdrawn. We should instead be using them as a launch-pad to move towards universal social protection in the long-term.

- 16.** There is a long way to go. We all know that as of 2020, only 46.9 percent of the global population was covered by at least one social protection benefit, thus leaving as many as 4 billion people unprotected.

- 17.** We need to accelerate efforts to build nationally appropriate universal social protection systems, including nationally defined social protection floors.

- 18.** We need to develop long-term, risk-informed and prevention-oriented recovery plans that will improve people's capacities and well-being as decided in the 2030 Agenda.

- 19.** During your session, you will examine how we can embark on a more inclusive and resilient recovery, building on the lessons we have learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 20.** You will be able to share your national experiences, highlight solutions that have proven effective and identify innovative approaches to address poverty and hunger and promote social development.
- 21.** Please take the opportunity offered by this session to also listen to NGOs, civil society and various stakeholders including the youth, women and children -- as well as many other vulnerable groups -- and reflect their voices in your decisions.
- 22.** In this way, your Commission will help ECOSOC and the HLPF to develop ***innovative, evidence-based and impactful policy guidance on recovering better from COVID-19.***

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- 23.** The inaugural Coordination Segment of ECOSOC -- which took place last week -- recognized the lead role of ECOSOC and its functional commissions and expert bodies in advancing a global recovery from the pandemic that puts us back on track to realize the SDGs.
- 24.** It brought together ECOSOC subsidiary bodies and UN system entities to take stock of lessons learned, and discuss ways to accelerate action towards the SDGs.

- 25.** It called on ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies to work towards a balanced and sustainable recovery from COVID-19, that improves the lives of people, increases economic prosperity and accelerates actions to protect the planet.
- 26.** Multiple ideas also emerged from the ECOSOC Partnership Forum -- which gathered an unprecedented number of stakeholders, the day before the Coordination Segment. These ideas and recommendations should also inspire and inform the work of this Commission.
- 27.** I commend the Commission for having selected its 2022 priority theme in alignment with that of ECOSOC and the HLPF. In fact, I recognize that your Commission has been consistently contributing to the Council's main theme. I also commend the Commission for considering ***Africa's social development.***
- 28.** We therefore count on the contribution of each and every one of you to enrich and energize efforts to recover better from COVID-19.
- 29.** I wish you fruitful discussions, and look forward to receiving the outcomes of your deliberations.

I thank you.