

PROVISIONAL

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8 December 1997

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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Substantive session of 1997

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 28th MEETING
(SECOND PART)*

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 15 July 1997, at 3.00 p.m.

President: Mr. GALUSKA (Czech Republic)

CONTENTS

REGIONAL COOPERATION (continued)

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REGIONAL COOPERATION (agenda item 10) (continued) (E/1997/5, 40 and Add.1, 41-45, 51)

Review and reform of the regional commissions (continued)

Mr. SOMOL (Czech Republic) said that the trend towards globalization did not make regional cooperation any less important. In fact, such cooperation was a key component of the new system of multilateral relations. It was at the regional level that the important principle of subsidiarity could best be applied. In Europe, regional cooperation remained a basic mechanism for furthering the integration of countries with economies in transition.

The regional commissions had the advantage of long familiarity with their member States and possessed specific analytical capacities. They were in the best position to reconcile the general demands generated by globalization with the specific circumstances and needs of individual countries. They were not necessarily limited to their own regions, however, but could exchange experience with other commissions and combine forces on common issues. The Council was well placed to encourage such cooperation. Similarly, their expertise could be taken advantage of by other United Nations agencies and programmes, and particularly by UNDP in its operational activities for development. The importance of their relations with the global functional commissions, on the other hand, was sometimes underestimated; there was room for improvement with regard to the definition of responsibilities and the coordination of activities.

His country greatly appreciated the work of ECE. Europe had undergone far-reaching transformations since the late 1980s. By responding effectively to the new circumstances, ECE had proved itself to be a valid component of the new architecture of multilateral institutions in the region and a flexible and efficient instrument for international cooperation. Certain ECE activities, such as UN EDIFACT (Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport) had an impact far beyond the European continent. ECE differed from the other regional commissions in that its substantive work tended to be close to that of the specialized agencies. That should not, however, be used as a pretext for depriving it of adequate funding to support both its substantive and operational capacities.

The outcome of the ECE reform process had proved satisfactory, given that financial constraints constituted a major factor. It was to be hoped, however, that there would ensue a real improvement in the traditional areas of ECE work as well as in more innovative spheres. The latter included, for example, its growing interrelationship with business, academic circles, NGOs and the public in general, which was in keeping with the widespread move away from State control of national economies.

The 55 ECE countries had shown a strong political will to arrive at a consensus on the Geneva reform process. Half the battle still remained to be won, however; it was for the Council now to secure practical support from the remaining Members of the United Nations and to create the necessary awareness of ECE needs at United Nations Headquarters in New York. It was the duty of ECE countries to honour the reform commitments adopted at the jubilee session of the Commission in April 1997 and ensure that they were translated into practice.

Mr. CHANDAVARKAR (United Nations Development Programme) said that UNDP attached great importance to cooperation at the regional level. A task force UNDP-REC was convened twice a year in order to promote cooperation with the regional commissions both at the policy level and at the operational level. It was headed on UNDP's side by the Associate Administrator, a former Executive Secretary of ESCAP. Periodic meetings were also held with the Executive Secretaries from the various regions.

The UNDP regional bureaux had each sought to involve the regional commission concerned in the process of formulating the regional cooperation framework (RCF), e.g. through meetings between representatives of Governments and United Nations agencies and meetings of experts on themes such as poverty. Outline proposals for the RCF were communicated to the regional commissions, and their documentation was in turn made use of by UNDP.

The regional commissions continued to play a significant role as executing agencies for UNDP regional projects. The UNDP-REC task force had identified a "flagship project" for execution by the regional commission in each region, which could serve as a platform for deepening the substantive policy dialogue on regional issues.

Under UNDP's new programming and support cost arrangements, the regional commissions and other executing agencies would have access to funding for substantive studies and project support through the programme development and

technical support windows, which they had not had before. Those two windows amounted to 3.6 per cent of UNDP core resources as opposed to 2.7 per cent in the previous cycle. In the programming cycle ending in 1996, UNDP had approved \$30 million worth of projects with regional commissions. The portion of core resources devoted to regional cooperation had been increased from 5.7 to 7.6 per cent in the current cycle.

Both UNDP and the regional commissions were concerned with sustainable people-centred development. That convergence in substantive agendas as well as the operational modalities now available under the new UNDP programming arrangements would no doubt greatly facilitate future collaboration.

Mr. MUSA (Observer for Nigeria) emphasized the enormous social, economic and political challenges which the African continent continued to pose to the world at large. Africa's poor economic performance and uneven development testified to a continued failure to tackle root causes, despite the vast amounts of aid, grants and loans allocated over the past three decades. African countries would not be able to free themselves from the cycle of poverty and underdevelopment until the inherent structural weaknesses and imbalances were properly appraised and addressed.

Vast resources needed to be mobilized, not only from within Africa, but also from outside, in order to improve the continent's productive capacities, modernize its institutions, develop and disseminate science and technology and improve the transport, communications and energy infrastructures. For recovery and growth to be sustainable, so massive a programme would require proper coordination and a sound foundation in stable and intra-African trade, which would boost internal competition and efficiency and enhance Africa's competitiveness in world markets. Such was the goal of both the Lagos Plan of Action and the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community.

The role of ECA and of a reformed and revitalized United Nations was to be defined in terms of what they could do to meet the formidable challenges which Africa posed to itself and to the entire world community. ECA should be strengthened so as to enable it to provide the necessary support, leadership and coordination for development cooperation between the various United Nations institutions and agencies. Nigeria endorsed the efforts already being made along those lines by the Executive Secretary.

Although ECA should continue to work closely with the various regional groupings, their further proliferation would not serve the interests of

Africa, if they had insufficient funding and ill-defined objectives. It was therefore necessary to reorganize and reorient such groupings. The international community should then provide the necessary resources to ensure the sustainability of those that were viable.

The failure of the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development 1986-1990 (UN-PAAERD) and the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF) was well known to all concerned. It was to be hoped that the latest initiative derived from the Cairo Agenda for Action on education, health, water, food security, poverty reduction, trade and employment generation would receive the necessary donor support. The 97 support for the initiative was welcome, and he hoped it would be followed by concrete action.

Mr. LOZANO ARREDONDO (Mexico) said his delegation attached great importance to regional cooperation and the role of the regional commissions. In particular, ECLAC had gained a reputation as a centre for economic thinking in the region and as a reliable source of information and indicators on economic and social matters. Its operational services played an important role in a wide range of areas, including specialized information, advisory services, training and support for regional cooperation, activities which should be pursued and expanded in the future.

A major achievement of ECLAC had been the way it had adapted its activities and programmes to changing conditions and new challenges in the region by reducing its size and improving the quality of its services during a period of major budgetary restrictions. Reorientation of its programme of work for 1998-1999 would allow ECLAC to concentrate on the issues most relevant to Latin America and the Caribbean. In order for ECLAC to pursue its efforts to increase efficiency while continuing to provide support to member States and to play a major role in issues of great importance at the regional and international levels, it should endeavour to implement the proposals made in the reports under consideration. Monitoring of the work of ECLAC by the United Nations and member States would doubtless lead to further improvement.

Member States, which had the most to gain from reform of the regional commissions, had actively involved themselves in that process. Experience had shown that the various regional commissions should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, a fact which should be taken into account in the Secretary-General's proposals for reform.

Mr. HIDAYAT (Observer for Indonesia) said that in a world characterized by globalization, the role of the regional commissions in assisting their member States to cope with the new challenges it presented was becoming more and more important. Their responsibilities had also grown as a result of agreements adopted at recent United Nations conferences in the economic and social fields. The regional commissions had already begun to implement serious reforms to improve the effectiveness with which they discharged their new tasks. His delegation particularly welcomed the efforts made in that direction by ESCAP.

The commission's response was all the more encouraging in that the resources available to them were getting scarcer and scarcer. That inevitably obliged them to cut back on activities. In view of their multidisciplinary nature, a certain minimum level of funding had to be preserved if they were to retain the necessary "critical mass" to deal with relevant issues.

The time had come for the regional commissions to explore innovative ways of expanding their activities. To that end, they could seek greater collaboration with other regional groupings and financial institutions, including regional banks. They could also develop their cooperation with the private sector and with NGOs. They could usefully promote regional trade and investment by facilitating business contacts within their respective regions. They could also assist member States with the development of subregional growth areas, which were assuming greater prominence in South-East Asia and were considered to hold great potential. The regional commissions ought to be accorded the Council's full support and allocated the resources they would need in order to help member States enhance their capacity to achieve sustainable people-centred development.

Mr. RUIZ BLANCO (Colombia), speaking on behalf of Venezuela and his own country, said that the regional commissions were the only bodies which belonged not only to the United Nations structure, but also to the range of other agencies concerned with regional cooperation in the area covered by their mandates. As part of the United Nations, the commissions were the instrument through which international cooperation was implemented at the regional level; at the same time, the achievements of a particular region could be passed on to other regions as a means of fulfilling the Organization's responsibility to promote development and international cooperation. At the regional level, the commissions gave member States an

opportunity to present their views in a neutral international forum and to participate on an equal basis in discussions and decision-making. Through the multisectoral analyses they prepared, they made it possible to have a clearer picture of the specific situations and needs of each region.

While there were many differences between the regional commissions, their common goal should be to improve their effectiveness in order to meet the changing needs of member States. There should be a clear division of responsibility for regional activities in Latin America and the Caribbean between ECLAC and the United Nations agencies, programmes and funds on the one hand and regional intergovernmental agencies, on the other, in order to ensure adequate coordination and to strengthen their respective activities. It was important for ECLAC to remain a centre of excellence charged with collaborating with member States in a comprehensive analysis of development processes geared to the design, monitoring and evaluation of public policies and the resulting provision of operational services in the fields of specialized information, advisory services, training and support for regional and international cooperation and coordination.

Colombia and Venezuela supported implementation of the management pilot project, which would allow ECLAC to carry out its activities more effectively and flexibly and, at the same time, to render a strict accounting of performance. It was essential that ECLAC should receive the financial resources necessary for fulfilment of its mandate and that its operational and analytical activities should not depend solely on extrabudgetary and bilateral funding, which threatened its independence.

Mr. PEDROSO CUESTA (Cuba) said that the current process of reform taking place in ECLAC under its resolution 553 (XXVI) was to a certain extent developing guidelines for the reform of other regional commissions. The pilot project was an interesting proposal, which called for further consideration by ECLAC member States, particularly in the light of the conclusions of the ad hoc working group set up under that same resolution. Some elements of the pilot project, related to financial management and accountability, should be examined more closely by member States and other relevant bodies since they might violate the budgetary procedures and practices established by the General Assembly. They also included ideas about reducing financing for certain programmes in the light of the way they were managed which had not

been adopted by consensus. The ongoing discussion of the pilot project in ACABQ had shown that several of the proposals made remained unclear.

With regard to the programme of work of the ECLAC system, 1998-1999, his delegation objected to the omission from document E/1997/5 of the reservations which it had expressed during the twenty-sixth session of ECLAC and at the first meeting of the ad hoc working group with regard to the subprogrammes, and in particular subject area 2.1, "Convergence of the integration process: economic, regulatory and institutional aspects". The area in question called for ECLAC to follow up on the results of the so-called Americas Summit, which had not been open to participation by all ECLAC member States. Furthermore, the United Nations medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, which was the primary legislative and policy framework for preparation of the Organization's budget, was insufficient to cover the activity to which his delegation objected. His delegation was unable to support the proposal and suggested that the subject area should be deleted.

In closing, he expressed his Government's support for ECLAC efforts to establish priorities for the implementation of activities appropriate to the interests and needs of the region.

Mr. FLORES (El Salvador) said that regional cooperation was of particular importance to small economies that found themselves being drawn into the process of globalization. The regional commissions provided assistance in areas ranging from the analysis of major world issues to the development of specific policies and instruments for individual countries. It was important to Latin American countries that, as part of the reorganization of the United Nations system, ECLAC should be strengthened as a centre of excellence in the area of economic and social studies charged with collaborating with member States in a comprehensive analysis of sustainable development and in the design, monitoring and evaluation of public policies. In that regard, he welcomed the proposal for a pilot project as part of the reform process.

Mr. ROSENTHAL (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), speaking as current coordinator of the regional commissions, assured the Council that the process of consultation between the regional commissions and their member States would continue. The latter were to be thanked for their support. He would reply to some of the points raised at a later meeting.

Mr. SOMOL (Czech Republic), introducing the draft resolution on the need to harmonize and improve United Nations informatics system for optimal utilization and accessibility by all States (E/1997/L.28), drew attention to the report of the Secretary-General (document E/1997/88) on international cooperation in the field of informatics, which contained, inter alia, a review of the activities of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics. The results achieved so far were considerable. By June 1997, virtually all permanent missions in New York had access through the United Nations and UNDP Internet Web servers to United Nations data, including press releases, speeches of the Secretary-General and sessional Council documents. The United Nations Home Page had been improved and would be further upgraded. Some 30 permanent missions in New York now managed sites on UNDP servers, which they had been able to design themselves thanks to training courses provided by the Secretariat.

Much work remained to be done before all United Nations documents and information would be available on-line. The new information technology represented an extension of traditional working methods and procedures which were capable of improving efficiency. Working methods did need to be modified to ensure that full use was made of the new tools. As stated in the draft resolution, all the envisaged activities of the Working Group would be carried out strictly within existing resources.

The meeting rose at 11 p.m.

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Mr. SOMOL (Czech Republic) said that the trend towards globalization did not make regional cooperation any less important. In fact, such cooperation was a key component of the new system of multilateral relations. It was at the regional level that the important principle of subsidiarity could best be applied. In Europe, regional cooperation remained a basic mechanism for furthering the integration of countries with economies in transition.

The regional commissions had the advantage of long familiarity with their member States and possessed specific analytical capacities. They were in the best position to reconcile the general demands generated by globalization with the specific circumstances and needs of individual countries. They were not necessarily limited to their own regions, however, but could exchange experience with other commissions and combine forces on common issues. The Council was well placed to encourage such cooperation. Similarly, their expertise could be taken advantage of by other United Nations agencies and programmes, and particularly by UNDP in its operational activities for development. The importance of their relations with the global functional commissions, on the other hand, was sometimes underestimated; there was room for improvement with regard to the definition of responsibilities and the coordination of activities.

His country greatly appreciated the work of ECE. Europe had undergone far-reaching transformations since the late 1980s. By responding effectively to the new circumstances, ECE had proved itself to be a valid component of the new architecture of multilateral institutions in the region and a flexible and efficient instrument for international cooperation. Certain ECE activities, such as UN EDIFACT (Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport) had an impact far beyond the European continent. ECE differed from the other regional commissions in that its substantive work tended to be close to that of the specialized agencies. That should not, however, be used as a pretext for depriving it of adequate funding to support both its substantive and operational capacities.

The outcome of the ECE reform process had proved satisfactory, given that financial constraints constituted a major factor. It was to be hoped, however, that there would ensue a real improvement in the traditional areas of ECE work as well as in more innovative spheres. The latter included, for example, its growing interrelationship with business, academic circles, NGOs and the public in general, which was in keeping with the widespread move away from State control of national economies.

The 55 ECE countries had shown a strong political will to arrive at a consensus on the Geneva reform process. Half the battle still remained to be won, however; it was for the Council now to secure practical support from the remaining Members of the United Nations and to create the necessary awareness of ECE needs at United Nations Headquarters in New York. It was the duty of ECE countries to honour the reform commitments adopted at the jubilee session of the Commission in April 1997 and ensure that they were translated into practice.

Mr. CHANDAVARKAR (United Nations Development Programme) said that UNDP attached great importance to cooperation at the regional level. A task force UNDP-REC was convened twice a year in order to promote cooperation with the regional commissions both at the policy level and at the operational level. It was headed on UNDP's side by the Associate Administrator, a former Executive Secretary of ESCAP. Periodic meetings were also held with the Executive Secretaries from the various regions.

The UNDP regional bureaux had each sought to involve the regional commission concerned in the process of formulating the regional cooperation framework (RCF), e.g. through meetings between representatives of Governments and United Nations agencies and meetings of experts on themes such as poverty. Outline proposals for the RCF were communicated to the regional commissions, and their documentation was in turn made use of by UNDP.

The regional commissions continued to play a significant role as executing agencies for UNDP regional projects. The UNDP-REC task force had identified a "flagship project" for execution by the regional commission in each region, which could serve as a platform for deepening the substantive policy dialogue on regional issues.

Under UNDP's new programming and support cost arrangements, the regional commissions and other executing agencies would have access to funding for substantive studies and project support through the programme development and

technical support windows, which they had not had before. Those two windows amounted to 3.6 per cent of UNDP core resources as opposed to 2.7 per cent in the previous cycle. In the programming cycle ending in 1996, UNDP had approved \$30 million worth of projects with regional commissions. The portion of core resources devoted to regional cooperation had been increased from 5.7 to 7.6 per cent in the current cycle.

Both UNDP and the regional commissions were concerned with sustainable people-centred development. That convergence in substantive agendas as well as the operational modalities now available under the new UNDP programming arrangements would no doubt greatly facilitate future collaboration.

Mr. MUSA (Observer for Nigeria) emphasized the enormous social, economic and political challenges which the African continent continued to pose to the world at large. Africa's poor economic performance and uneven development testified to a continued failure to tackle root causes, despite the vast amounts of aid, grants and loans allocated over the past three decades. African countries would not be able to free themselves from the cycle of poverty and underdevelopment until the inherent structural weaknesses and imbalances were properly appraised and addressed.

Vast resources needed to be mobilized, not only from within Africa, but also from outside, in order to improve the continent's productive capacities, modernize its institutions, develop and disseminate science and technology and improve the transport, communications and energy infrastructures. For recovery and growth to be sustainable, so massive a programme would require proper coordination and a sound foundation in stable and intra-African trade, which would boost internal competition and efficiency and enhance Africa's competitiveness in world markets. Such was the goal of both the Lagos Plan of Action and the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community.

The role of ECA and of a reformed and revitalized United Nations was to be defined in terms of what they could do to meet the formidable challenges which Africa posed to itself and to the entire world community. ECA should be strengthened so as to enable it to provide the necessary support, leadership and coordination for development cooperation between the various United Nations institutions and agencies. Nigeria endorsed the efforts already being made along those lines by the Executive Secretary.

Although ECA should continue to work closely with the various regional groupings, their further proliferation would not serve the interests of

Africa, if they had insufficient funding and ill-defined objectives. It was therefore necessary to reorganize and reorient such groupings. The international community should then provide the necessary resources to ensure the sustainability of those that were viable.

The failure of the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development 1986-1990 (UN-PAAERD) and the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF) was well known to all concerned. It was to be hoped that the latest initiative derived from the Cairo Agenda for Action on education, health, water, food security, poverty reduction, trade and employment generation would receive the necessary donor support. The 97 support for the initiative was welcome, and he hoped it would be followed by concrete action.

Mr. LOZANO ARREDONDO (Mexico) said his delegation attached great importance to regional cooperation and the role of the regional commissions. In particular, ECLAC had gained a reputation as a centre for economic thinking in the region and as a reliable source of information and indicators on economic and social matters. Its operational services played an important role in a wide range of areas, including specialized information, advisory services, training and support for regional cooperation, activities which should be pursued and expanded in the future.

A major achievement of ECLAC had been the way it had adapted its activities and programmes to changing conditions and new challenges in the region by reducing its size and improving the quality of its services during a period of major budgetary restrictions. Reorientation of its programme of work for 1998-1999 would allow ECLAC to concentrate on the issues most relevant to Latin America and the Caribbean. In order for ECLAC to pursue its efforts to increase efficiency while continuing to provide support to member States and to play a major role in issues of great importance at the regional and international levels, it should endeavour to implement the proposals made in the reports under consideration. Monitoring of the work of ECLAC by the United Nations and member States would doubtless lead to further improvement.

Member States, which had the most to gain from reform of the regional commissions, had actively involved themselves in that process. Experience had shown that the various regional commissions should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, a fact which should be taken into account in the Secretary-General's proposals for reform.

Mr. HIDAYAT (Observer for Indonesia) said that in a world characterized by globalization, the role of the regional commissions in assisting their member States to cope with the new challenges it presented was becoming more and more important. Their responsibilities had also grown as a result of agreements adopted at recent United Nations conferences in the economic and social fields. The regional commissions had already begun to implement serious reforms to improve the effectiveness with which they discharged their new tasks. His delegation particularly welcomed the efforts made in that direction by ESCAP.

The commission's response was all the more encouraging in that the resources available to them were getting scarcer and scarcer. That inevitably obliged them to cut back on activities. In view of their multidisciplinary nature, a certain minimum level of funding had to be preserved if they were to retain the necessary "critical mass" to deal with relevant issues.

The time had come for the regional commissions to explore innovative ways of expanding their activities. To that end, they could seek greater collaboration with other regional groupings and financial institutions, including regional banks. They could also develop their cooperation with the private sector and with NGOs. They could usefully promote regional trade and investment by facilitating business contacts within their respective regions. They could also assist member States with the development of subregional growth areas, which were assuming greater prominence in South-East Asia and were considered to hold great potential. The regional commissions ought to be accorded the Council's full support and allocated the resources they would need in order to help member States enhance their capacity to achieve sustainable people-centred development.

Mr. RUIZ BLANCO (Colombia), speaking on behalf of Venezuela and his own country, said that the regional commissions were the only bodies which belonged not only to the United Nations structure, but also to the range of other agencies concerned with regional cooperation in the area covered by their mandates. As part of the United Nations, the commissions were the instrument through which international cooperation was implemented at the regional level; at the same time, the achievements of a particular region could be passed on to other regions as a means of fulfilling the Organization's responsibility to promote development and international cooperation. At the regional level, the commissions gave member States an

opportunity to present their views in a neutral international forum and to participate on an equal basis in discussions and decision-making. Through the multisectoral analyses they prepared, they made it possible to have a clearer picture of the specific situations and needs of each region.

While there were many differences between the regional commissions, their common goal should be to improve their effectiveness in order to meet the changing needs of member States. There should be a clear division of responsibility for regional activities in Latin America and the Caribbean between ECLAC and the United Nations agencies, programmes and funds on the one hand and regional intergovernmental agencies, on the other, in order to ensure adequate coordination and to strengthen their respective activities. It was important for ECLAC to remain a centre of excellence charged with collaborating with member States in a comprehensive analysis of development processes geared to the design, monitoring and evaluation of public policies and the resulting provision of operational services in the fields of specialized information, advisory services, training and support for regional and international cooperation and coordination.

Colombia and Venezuela supported implementation of the management pilot project, which would allow ECLAC to carry out its activities more effectively and flexibly and, at the same time, to render a strict accounting of performance. It was essential that ECLAC should receive the financial resources necessary for fulfilment of its mandate and that its operational and analytical activities should not depend solely on extrabudgetary and bilateral funding, which threatened its independence.

Mr. PEDROSO CUESTA (Cuba) said that the current process of reform taking place in ECLAC under its resolution 553 (XXVI) was to a certain extent developing guidelines for the reform of other regional commissions. The pilot project was an interesting proposal, which called for further consideration by ECLAC member States, particularly in the light of the conclusions of the ad hoc working group set up under that same resolution. Some elements of the pilot project, related to financial management and accountability, should be examined more closely by member States and other relevant bodies since they might violate the budgetary procedures and practices established by the General Assembly. They also included ideas about reducing financing for certain programmes in the light of the way they were managed which had not

been adopted by consensus. The ongoing discussion of the pilot project in ACABQ had shown that several of the proposals made remained unclear.

With regard to the programme of work of the ECLAC system, 1998-1999, his delegation objected to the omission from document E/1997/5 of the reservations which it had expressed during the twenty-sixth session of ECLAC and at the first meeting of the ad hoc working group with regard to the subprogrammes, and in particular subject area 2.1, "Convergence of the integration process: economic, regulatory and institutional aspects". The area in question called for ECLAC to follow up on the results of the so-called Americas Summit, which had not been open to participation by all ECLAC member States. Furthermore, the United Nations medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, which was the primary legislative and policy framework for preparation of the Organization's budget, was insufficient to cover the activity to which his delegation objected. His delegation was unable to support the proposal and suggested that the subject area should be deleted.

In closing, he expressed his Government's support for ECLAC efforts to establish priorities for the implementation of activities appropriate to the interests and needs of the region.

Mr. FLORES (El Salvador) said that regional cooperation was of particular importance to small economies that found themselves being drawn into the process of globalization. The regional commissions provided assistance in areas ranging from the analysis of major world issues to the development of specific policies and instruments for individual countries. It was important to Latin American countries that, as part of the reorganization of the United Nations system, ECLAC should be strengthened as a centre of excellence in the area of economic and social studies charged with collaborating with member States in a comprehensive analysis of sustainable development and in the design, monitoring and evaluation of public policies. In that regard, he welcomed the proposal for a pilot project as part of the reform process.

Mr. ROSENTHAL (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), speaking as current coordinator of the regional commissions, assured the Council that the process of consultation between the regional commissions and their member States would continue. The latter were to be thanked for their support. He would reply to some of the points raised at a later meeting.

Mr. SOMOL (Czech Republic), introducing the draft resolution on the need to harmonize and improve United Nations informatics system for optimal utilization and accessibility by all States (E/1997/L.28), drew attention to the report of the Secretary-General (document E/1997/88) on international cooperation in the field of informatics, which contained, inter alia, a review of the activities of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics. The results achieved so far were considerable. By June 1997, virtually all permanent missions in New York had access through the United Nations and UNDP Internet Web servers to United Nations data, including press releases, speeches of the Secretary-General and sessional Council documents. The United Nations Home Page had been improved and would be further upgraded. Some 30 permanent missions in New York now managed sites on UNDP servers, which they had been able to design themselves thanks to training courses provided by the Secretariat.

Much work remained to be done before all United Nations documents and information would be available on-line. The new information technology represented an extension of traditional working methods and procedures which were capable of improving efficiency. Working methods did need to be modified to ensure that full use was made of the new tools. As stated in the draft resolution, all the envisaged activities of the Working Group would be carried out strictly within existing resources.

The meeting rose at 11 p.m.