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on Monday, 13 July 1998, at 3 p.m.

President:

Mr. OLHAYE
(Vice-President)

(Djibouti)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
COOPERATION (continued)

- (b) FOLLOW-UP TO POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
(continued) (E/1998/48 and Add.1, E/1997/110)

Mr. KOLBY (Observer for Norway) said that the effectiveness of United Nations economic and social programmes should be measured by their impact at the country level. He agreed with the Secretary-General that national ownership was one of the most important ways to ensure that operational activities achieved their desired impact. Norway welcomed the increased cooperation between United Nations agencies at the country level, particularly through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), and hoped that the current reform measures would result in a more coherent and effective United Nations system. In that connection, the proposed establishment of United Nations houses in more than 50 States was a symbol of a unified United Nations system and should facilitate closer cooperation.

Norway also welcomed the increased interest which a number of specialized agencies had shown in joining UNDAF, which had the potential to develop into a framework for joint programming of all United Nations development activities. At the country level, it was crucial to strengthen the position of the resident coordinator as the leader of the United Nations country team. A strong team leader would ensure a more constructive dialogue between the United Nations system and the host country in support of national development policies. Improved coordination was also needed in the areas of conflict prevention, humanitarian assistance and development cooperation. The common objective of all agencies of the United Nations system should be to get the best results for those who needed their assistance most; they could achieve that goal by focusing on translating agreed policies into concrete action at the country level.

Mr. LE LUONG MINH (Viet Nam) recalled his Government's commitment to work in close partnership with the United Nations in pursuit of development and improved living conditions, especially for the poorest groups. During the late

1970s and the 1980s, the United Nations had been an important window to the outside world and had given Viet Nam access to multiple sources of knowledge, technology and capital. That cooperation had helped Viet Nam to overcome its pressing economic and social problems and to successfully make the transition from war to peaceful development. During the 1990s, the Organization had facilitated Viet Nam's transition towards a new system of economic management, which had entailed economic, social and institutional reforms. More recently, it had facilitated the country's integration into the regional and global economy.

He wished to emphasize the crucial role of the recipient country in the success of development cooperation. In that regard, one of his Government's key policies in the current phase of development was to ensure the full exploitation of Viet Nam's domestic resources and to make the most effective use of external resources. In order to be effective, United Nations development programmes should be based on national plans and priorities and should comprise a balanced mixture of technical assistance, material support, financing and technology transfers.

With their vast experience and skills, United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies had an important role to play in the transfer of technology, particularly since some technologies, though of crucial importance to developing countries, were not of immediate interest to international business, one of the main vehicles for the transfer of technology. United Nations resources should also be used for capacity-building aimed at strengthening poverty alleviation programmes.

The relative lack of familiarity with the United Nations development system and the lack of knowledge of the specific circumstances of partner countries were obstacles to the full utilization of the resources and opportunities offered through cooperation. In that connection, the 1998 mid-term review conference of the consultative group of donors for Viet Nam had agreed that information and transparency were of critical importance for the efficient utilization of resources. In view of the rapid changes which were taking place both globally and within the United Nations, the Organization should periodically review its development activities within the framework of the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system.

The establishment of UNDAF would improve the coherence and effectiveness of United Nations development operations and Viet Nam was pleased to have been selected as a pilot State for the UNDAF exercise. The timing of the exercise, however, had given rise to a number of problems, since the various funds and programmes had already approved their individual country programmes.

Among the issues that needed further consideration were the relationship between UNDAF and country strategy notes (CSN) and the question of how to uphold the principle which the General Assembly had stressed in resolution 50/120, namely, that national plans and priorities constituted the only viable frame of reference for the national programming of operational activities for development within the United Nations system. In that regard, Viet Nam supported the position of the Group of 77 and China on the reform of United Nations development cooperation in general and of UNDAF in particular. It therefore could not embrace the view that the country strategy note represented the demand side of development cooperation while UNDAF represented the supply side response by the United Nations system to the needs identified by recipient Governments. Such a view was not an accurate description of the country strategy note, which was a document prepared and agreed to by both the Government concerned and the United Nations.

Viet Nam shared the view that the visions, themes and plans of action which had been adopted at the global conferences were an integral part of sustainable development and that while follow-up activities should be attuned to the specific conditions of each country, they should not obscure the need to promote international economic cooperation and economic growth.

Lastly, he supported the efforts being made to strengthen the resident coordinator system, which was functioning effectively in Viet Nam, thereby facilitating cooperation not only among United Nations agencies but also among Viet Nam's various development partners.

Mr. AZAIEZ (Tunisia) said that the report of the Secretary-General (E/1998/48 and Add.1) seemed to be directed more towards the specialized agencies of the United Nations than to Member States. It also placed emphasis on issues, such as the choice of resident coordinator, which were not among the priorities of Member States. The internal wrangling about the consolidation of the offices of the various United Nations agencies in host countries was also of little interest to Member States.

On the other hand, the report had glossed over certain other issues that were of great interest to Member States. The limited success of the country strategy notes, for example, had received only a cursory mention. Similarly, the discussion on relations between recipient countries and organizations of the United Nations system was vague. It was unclear, for example, what was meant by the expression "national constituencies" in paragraph 6 of the report (E/1998/48). Furthermore, not enough emphasis had been placed on the important issue of national execution. Finally, Tunisia was alarmed at the downward trend in the flow of resources to developing countries.

Mr. CHANDAVARKAR (United Nations Development Programme), introducing the revised guidelines for the review of policies and procedures concerning technical cooperation among developing countries (E/1997/110), said that the revised guidelines were the result of a concerted effort to ensure a coordinated approach to the promotion and application of technical cooperation among developing countries by the organizations of the United Nations system. He drew particular attention to section VI of the revised guidelines, which identified the measures to be taken by the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system. It was recommended that the revised guidelines on policies and procedures concerning technical cooperation among developing countries should be approved by the General Assembly after review by the Council.

Ms. GALINDO (Colombia) said that the main responsibility for the success of operational activities for development lay with Member States themselves. The United Nations system, through the resident coordinator, facilitated those activities. Because of that interrelationship, it was important to develop specific guidelines and performance benchmarks and to encourage the participation of civil society in the host countries. Emphasis should also be placed on such issues as poverty eradication, public administration reform and increased resource availability.

Mr. ZHDANOVICH (Belarus) said that his Government supported the measures that were being taken to strengthen United Nations activities at the country level, including the shifting of staff from Headquarters to the field in order to increase accountability. It also supported the activities of resident coordinators in the field. Greater attention, however, should be paid to the relations between the resident coordinator and the host country and periodic consultations should take place between the resident coordinator and national

partners. To that end, the practice of combining the resident coordinator system with that of the resident representative should be maintained. He wished to call attention to the fact that the Resident Representative in Belarus had been reassigned more than two weeks previously and no information was available about the appointment of his successor. He hoped that the process would be completed without undue delay.

The PRESIDENT said that the general discussion was concluded and introduced Mr. Haemmerli, Chief, Development Cooperation Policy Branch, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Facilitator of the panel on impact evaluation.

Panel on impact evaluation

Mr. HAEMMERLI, Facilitator, referred to the report on the impact of United Nations system support to capacity-building 1980-1995 and said that the start of the impact evaluation called for in the last policy review had been delayed until late 1997, due to funding constraints. Although it was originally hoped to include more countries, only six had been evaluated, selected on the basis of an inventory of the capacity-building which had occurred in the country between 1980-1995 prepared by nearly 40 resident coordinator teams.

Delegations now had the opportunity of engaging in a dialogue on impact evaluation with a panel of external experts whom he was pleased to introduce.

Mr. MORGAN, Panellist, said that he had taken part in the impact evaluation in Pakistan. The overall evaluation exercise had benefited the development community. It was still learning about how outside intervention helps developing countries and it had been given an insight into the positive performance of the United Nations system as a system. Moreover, it had demonstrated the essential role played by the United Nations in the donor system in Pakistan, despite its relatively small contribution to Pakistan's total aid funds.

He drew attention to the paradox in Pakistan between the low human development indicators and the enormous reserves of capability and commitment, and suggested that capacity-liberation was a better term than capacity-building in that context. In the late 1980s, the United Nations system had initiated a new phase of activities to try and release that capacity by forming creative coalitions with non-governmental organizations, the private sector, provincial governments and communities. In that way, the United Nations had developed a

new role in Pakistan, particularly in the early 1990s. A crucial benefit was that it was one of the few organizations in Pakistan that could function as a catalyst within and outside of the Government.

Taking into account the low level of funding, the classic Government-oriented programme of the early 1980s did quite well. In the mid-1980s, assistance in the reform of the principal Government structures met with mixed success, but then in the late 1980s and the 1990s, the United Nations developed a new and quite successful role as an instrument of community mobilization at the village level and promotion of new forms of district administration, good governance and institutional development. In sum, the intervention of the United Nations system in Pakistan was quite positive.

Mr. WIESNER, Panellist, commented on impact evaluation strategies and incentives with the object of identifying critical points that might help in future exercises. He said that United Nations programmes tended to give too much importance to the merits or qualities of a programme and neglected to look at the limitations or impediments - that is - to use the constraints approach. Both the supportive and the opposing interests of a programme in any sector should be taken into account when developing the programme strategy or carrying out its evaluation. For example, in the case of Zimbabwe, over 300 projects were in place during the period of the study, suggesting proliferation and dissipation of effort. Obviously, many different types of interests at all levels had produced the 300 projects and that factor should have been taken into account when the projects were being analysed so that priorities could be established. The telecommunications programme in Brazil had been far more successful because interests were much more specific and there was an institutional focus.

Capacity development was the outcome of existing incentive structures, and if there were severe limitations, then the wrong incentives were in place. It was easier to establish incentives in sectors where interests were more focused. Very often in the social sectors, interests had built up over a period of time and had shaped institutional structures, which in turn determined the constraints. It was difficult to make changes under such circumstances. Projects should be analysed to discover the source of the opposition and it should be brought into the planning exercise. It was very important for all

involved to realize that restrictions often originated in the sector or institution of the recipient country.

Mr. RAHEEM, Panellist, said that support should be provided to build national capacity to assess the impact of United Nations activities. Support could be provided on a variety of levels but, above all, the convening power of the system should be used to clarify any questions the country had concerning operational activities. There should be extensive, public, transparent analysis of what the system was doing and, in particular, what results were expected. There was a lack of a sense of cost effectiveness in some studies because, although the objectives were excellent, they needed to be translated into tangible results.

National efforts to create greater capacity to develop evaluative indicators should be supported. Likewise, countries should be helped to link the instruments of the United Nations system to serve operational activities. More than just resources, open, transparent process was needed and application of information and indicators should emphasize the link between management and results. He was willing to discuss the best practices, case studies and the role of the Staff College in encouraging the process, if necessary.

Mr. ROHNER (Observer for Switzerland) inquired whether the evaluators had observed any progress over the 15 years covered by the pilot evaluations in supplying the missing indicators needed to provide hard facts about programme impacts using proper baseline data. He asked also whether the panel knew of alternatives to such evaluations in addition to adoption of best practices from "success stories", given that evaluations had a cost-effectiveness limit.

Mr. AHMED (Bangladesh) contested the view that assistance from donors was contingent on the performance of the United Nations system in the field: although the United Nations system did have credibility and did produce positive results, it was a mere appendix to the country assistance reviews of the World Bank. The problem was that although the Bank had an elaborate system for providing impact evaluations of its own projects, it often seemed to ignore its own relevant findings when embarking on new projects.

He said that donors should also think about opportunity costs: even where project impact evaluations per se were positive, if government policy was not pro-development enough, the external factors could be so negative that the money would have been better spent elsewhere.

Mr. WEDENIG (Observer for Austria) asked whether the United Nations system, in its development activities, was implementing the gender perspective pursuant to the 1985 Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. He inquired also whether project impacts had been evaluated with a gender perspective in mind, and if so, what the results had been.

He noted that in some cases lack of coordination between the United Nations system and other donors had nullified any positive impact and asked the panellists if they had any recommendations on coordination, not only within the United Nations system but also with other donors, that would help avoid such situations.

Mr. MORGAN, Panellist, said that some of the earliest projects the evaluators had looked at had lacked indicators that could be used for evaluation; however, the indicators and even outcomes of projects from the 1990s were more credible. There were still very few usable indicators for capacity and capacity development, although work was being done in the international community to rectify that lacunae.

The pilot evaluation study in Pakistan had shown that the donor community fell into two groups: the international financing institutions, particularly the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, which supplied a huge proportion of aid resources, and a large group of small donors, including the United Nations system. Pakistan lacked any major bilateral donors. However, the group of small donors contributed ideas out of proportion to their financial input, particularly in the social area, where the international financial institutions had little experience.

Although he did not disagree in theory that opportunity costs should be considered, it was always difficult to determine whether any particular project had been the most cost-effective way of solving a particular problem: in the case of Pakistan, the evaluators had asked only if the project had been at least a justifiable experiment, worthwhile in terms of increased experience in a sector and whether the results would be replicable or the project could be scaled up. Their evaluation could be a basis for discussing what other options the Government might find useful.

Mr. WIESNER, Panellist, said that in his view the World Bank's evaluation system was thorough and professional. Indeed, it amazed him that

countries, and institutions other than the Bank, would spend huge sums on projects, fail to include evaluation as part of the cost, claim that evaluation was "too expensive" and then complain that they had no results to go on: evaluation must be integral to projects in the same way that bridges must include the last metre of roadway.

There had to be incentives for coordination. Only proper analysis could reveal what incentives and disincentives were at work; it was the essential justification for altering them to yield the desired result.

Mr. RAHEEM, Panellist, said that there had been clear progress over the 15-year evaluation period in the use of indicators, but it was not enough and did not address the issue of national ownership: the exercise had to be carried beyond a concern within the United Nations system towards helping countries generate five or six key "portable" indicators. Good work was being done in that domain in several field offices.

However, the real problem lay not with indicators but with baselines, because with limited funding, cost-effectiveness became a constraint. One way around that constraint was to obtain a pragmatic baseline by including any and all relevant studies available within a country; that baseline could then be improved as projects proceeded.

Impact evaluations were expensive exercises if they were viewed as ends in themselves; as part or an array of instruments, including best practice and case studies, they could complete the accountability circle when public resources were involved, form the final judgement on performance, act as a form of institutional memory and be part of an institutional learning process. Strategically, rather than mount major impact evaluation exercises, impacts could be evaluated cumulatively by taking operational evaluations and reviewing them over time.

The importance of case studies was that they remedied two deficiencies: first, whereas criticisms, judgements and opinions abounded, descriptions of the vagaries of capacity-building at the country level were scarce; and second, case studies provided baselines. Also, they provided information freely and openly, in the public domain, for analysis and research.

Mr. MACONICK, Panellist, said that the terms of reference for the pilot evaluations had included a gender perspective. However, the responses to the gender questions had not been very satisfactory.

In conducting impact evaluations, it was worthwhile to keep the question of cost-effectiveness in mind even though one might never be able to answer it. The resurgence of interest in many United Nations entities in describing and measuring impact and the General Assembly's request for impact evaluations were not coincidental: the cost-effectiveness of the impact evaluation might therefore go beyond the strict limits of the exercise itself.

Mr. HAEMMERLI, Facilitator, noted that the evaluators had communicated the results of their pilot evaluations in respect of gender mainstreaming for inclusion in report E/1998/54, which had been discussed by the Council under the agenda item which included the question of the advancement of women: implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the role of operational activities in promoting, in particular, capacity-building and resource mobilization for enhancing the participation of women in development.

Mr. BAHAMONDES (Canada) asked how the panel viewed the comparative advantages of the United Nations system in the larger context of international development, given that the system's role in Pakistan had been shown to be more catalytic than financial; he could confirm that that conclusion was correct from his own experiences with United Nations development activities in other countries. He wondered how one might go about measuring the contribution of such a catalytic, advocacy role, especially when the mix changed from country to country.

Since projects needed careful monitoring and assessment, he suggested that the triennial policy review should be shifted to an annual basis.

Evaluation should be included at the planning stage: if that had been done for conference follow-up purposes, the United Nations system might not be struggling, more than five year afterwards, over what indicators it should use to measure results.

Ms. BLACKBURNE (United Kingdom) noted that the pilot evaluations covered the period from 1980 to 1995, and asked if the panel had found any signs that the coordination problems which the evaluations had identified had been addressed by changes subsequent to 1995 such as the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

Ms. QUANRUD (United States of America) observed that one of the strengths of the United Nations system was that it worked with experimental and demonstration development projects, and asked if there were signs that such

experiments and demonstrations were being scaled up or moved into a sustainable mode; if so, she wondered whether Member States should regard such signs as measures of success. She noted that one pilot evaluation had revealed negative capacity-building, possibly revealing a need for capacity-building guidelines.

She asked if the panel believed that the funds and programmes were institutions that were capable of learning on their own or whether independent evaluators needed to be brought in periodically to sharpen the focus and improve both product and process.

Ms. SUZUKI (Japan) strongly supported the need for incentives for improving coordination. Since capacity-building needed administrative and managerial capacity to achieve sustainability, she asked to what extent institution-building was included in the development work of the United Nations and how the impact could be measured.

She would like to know in which countries the United Nations system, in its catalytic role and with its experimental and demonstration projects, might be able to make the difference in terms of bilateral cooperation.

She asked also how the process of project impact evaluation might be accelerated: granted that additional resources were needed, the evaluations might not have to look further afield at other countries, best practice and lessons to draw from failures.

She agreed that, logically, the constraints affecting a project should be included as part of project design; she would welcome examples of where that had been done by the United Nations system.

Mr. ABDELLATIF (Observer for Egypt) asked what criteria had been applied in selecting the period covered by the pilot evaluations. He asked also how the Governments of the six countries covered by the pilot evaluations had reacted to those evaluations and what priority they accorded to capacity-building. Further, he wondered whether the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions had coordinated their capacity-building efforts in any way in the countries covered because the pilot evaluations appeared to show that they had not, in which case more coordination was obviously needed.

He inquired what percentage of project costs the World Bank spent on evaluations, for comparison with the range of expenditures for various United Nations bodies given in the report (E/1998/48) and whether the percentages shown therein had been calculated in such a way as to be comparable.

He believed that the pilot impact evaluations showed that impact evaluation needed to be integrated into the work of the funds and programmes and correlated with the UNDAF exercise because the United Nations system was currently not doing enough evaluation work and would never be able to work efficiently if it did not generate baseline data. Governments also had a role in generating such data, and more attention should be given to assisting them in doing so.

Mr. MORGAN, Panellist, said that the United Nations had some comparative advantage in Pakistan because of its field-level technical expertise and power to generate and disseminate ideas. It was seen as a respected neutral party and had the capacity to undertake small new projects and advocate policies and was served by talented local staff with decision-making authority. That combination gave it flexibility and the ability to form networks and coalitions.

With reference to the problem of measuring progress, he said that there was a difference between measuring capacity and capacity for development. The former could be measured by analysing real progress made on the ground. The latter was more difficult to measure, since it included intangibles such as increased technical ability, the ability to combine and create resources to promote development, and management, development and institutional design; there would also be differences between measuring the performance of a single organization or a large system.

With reference to the scaling up and replication of programmes, the questions to be asked were: could the project be replicated elsewhere, could it be integrated into the main government programmes and could it grow in size? The United Nations system in general in Pakistan had not been analysed sufficiently, however, to give a definitive answer.

Coordination was given a high priority and official recognition as an UNDAF site had been requested. However, there were two problems: the difficulty of simultaneously maximizing all contributions while seeking a more coherent impact, and the need to limit escalating costs during joint actions (more meetings, slow decision-taking process).

Mr. WIESNER, Panellist, said that evaluation was especially useful as a catalyst for policy change on condition that it have some link to changes in resource allocations. Sometimes problems could be solved simply by going through the evaluation process and, in some cases, strategic evaluations could be useful in choosing possible donors.

Mr. RAHEEM, Panellist, in response to the representative of Canada, said that close observation of a programme should suffice to measure advocacy and policy roles, and, as for how far to push the process, he said that more time and study were needed since they were still at the pilot project stage. In response to the representative of the United Kingdom, he said that the integration of the questions of participation, policy impact and gender were included in the collective approach being adopted by each agency working in the country.

In response to the question from the representative of the United States concerning upscaling, he said that there was some tension between those who favoured the programme approach and those who favoured more small-scale projects. He noted the comment from the representative of Zimbabwe concerning the negative impact of technical cooperation on capacity-building. With regard to the necessity of bringing in outside evaluators, he said that an external perspective was useful but not absolutely necessary. Baseline data, if used more rigorously, could provide the basis for a more standardized country assessment process.

Mr. MACONICK, Panellist, with reference to upscaling, said that they were dealing with a pilot project which desperately needed to have sufficient resources. With reference to the problem of negative capacity-building, he said that he had read the evaluations of the projects in Zimbabwe and two other countries, which had raised the questions of coordination, turf and national ownership. As for the question whether the United Nations institutions were learning institutions, he said that they were certainly capable of carrying out objective internal reviews but that the Economic and Social Council could also benefit from an external review; the two should be complementary. In response to the question from the representative of Egypt concerning the time-frame, he said that the choice had been purely pragmatic, since before 1980 little information would have been available and they therefore chose the period 1980-1995. He felt that the evaluation process had been a cost-effective exercise, although no comparative statistics were available yet.

Mr. KÄÄRIÄINEN (Finland) said that he hoped the evaluation process would continue and provide feedback on the appropriateness of actions undertaken, although he would have liked to have had more time to study the background documentation. He wondered whether there had been any coordination

with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) working group on aid evaluation. He also wondered how the organizers had ensured national ownership and local participation within the evaluation process.

Mr. ABDALLA (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) wondered how the evaluation had been undertaken, what indicators had been used since the United Nations had not yet agreed upon any indicators, and to what extent the countries involved had been consulted and allowed to participate. What roles had the evaluation panel and the resident coordinator played? Without baseline data or a point of comparison, how did the panel arrive at its conclusions? He stressed some developing countries' reservations about the resident coordinators: how could the panel ensure that it was receiving unbiased information from the coordinators? They might simply be attempting to justify their own positions. In addition, what criteria had the panel used to decide whether the desired capacity had been built?

Mr. HAEMMERLI, Facilitator, in response to the comment from the representative of Libya, stressed that the evaluation had focused strictly on the United Nations system, not on government performance.

Mr. MACONICK, Panellist, in response to the representative of Finland, said that there had been consultation with the OECD group. In addition, Governments, donors and United Nations agencies had been encouraged to evaluate operational activities so that there would be no monopoly of information. However, there had been no response from those participants. Governments had been consulted with regard to local participation via the resident coordinator offices and the teams had been made up of one North and one South representative in order to have a balanced viewpoint. In the absence of defined indicators or baseline data, persons experienced in capacity-building had been sought out to participate in the evaluation process. He hoped that in the future a more rigorous process could be instituted.

Mr. RAHEEM, Panellist, in response to the concerns about subjectivity expressed by the representative of Libya, said that the process had been a transparent one, based on full and open discussion. Since they were dealing with a pilot project, no specific indicators had been defined but hopefully in future specific indicators could be developed.

Mr. MORGAN, Panellist, stressed the logistical difficulties faced by the evaluators, who had had two weeks in the field and then a further week to

write their report, as compared, for example, to the World Bank study on Tanzania, which had taken six months to prepare. He wondered whether the latter report's conclusions were really that much more useful to decision makers.

Mr. WIESNER, Panellist, in response to the representative of Japan, said that strategic evaluations could be tried although they were not a perfect solution; they could lead to policy decisions and resource allocation, but he once again stressed the need to link the evaluation process to allocation of resources.

Mr. ABDALLA (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) reiterated that the client Government must be part of the evaluation process and the evaluation team should have direct access to the Government, rather than relying simply on the resident coordinator. The evaluation process should also assess the performance of United Nations staff in the field.

Mr. HAEMMERLI, Facilitator, reassured the representative of Libya that the team had had direct access to the client Governments and stressed once again that the exercise had been an evaluation of the United Nations system.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.