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Session on integrated and coordinated implementation and  
follow-up of major United Nations conferences and summits

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 7th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,  
on Wednesday, 13 May 1998, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. SOMAVIA (Chile)  
later: Mr. SYCHOU (Belarus)  
(Vice-President)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

INTEGRATED AND COORDINATED IMPLEMENTATION AND FOLLOW-UP OF MAJOR UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCES AND SUMMITS (E/1998/19)

Panel discussion with chairpersons of functional commissions: "Experience of the functional commissions in an integrated and coordinated follow-up to conferences; implementing the Council's guidance and strengthening the process"

Ms. FLOR (Germany), speaking as Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women, welcomed the pioneering dialogue between the Council and its functional commissions and thanked the President of the Council for organizing the first working luncheon between the Bureau of the Council and the chairpersons of the commissions. Her presentation would focus on the need for integration and coordination; the role of the Commission on the Status of Women in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women; lessons learned from efforts to ensure integrated follow-up; and proposals for improving the follow-up process.

There was an urgent need to ensure the integrated follow-up of all major conferences because of the overlap of the issues contained in the Beijing Platform for Action with those addressed by other conferences. Examples included the questions of women and health, women and poverty, women and human rights and women and the environment, which were critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Even more important was the linkage between gender mainstreaming, a cross-cutting theme, and all the major United Nations conferences held during the past decade. The situation of men and women in the contemporary world was very different in many of the areas dealt with by the conferences. For example, in the area of education, two thirds of illiterate adults were women; and in the area of health, women's concerns, particularly with regard to their reproductive health, were not addressed as fully as the health issues of men. It was the Council that had first defined gender mainstreaming as a process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programmes in all areas and at all levels and the strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension

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of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefited equally and inequality was not perpetuated. Integrated and coordinated follow-up would help to tailor policies and programmes to genuine needs. For example, the distribution of pamphlets on the cutting of firewood would be a misguided initiative, since the women who carried out that activity were frequently illiterate. The Commission on the Status of Women had discussed the importance of interaction with other commissions and would be prepared to share its knowledge.

As for the role of the Commission on the Status of Women in the follow-up process, it was part of a three-tiered mechanism established after the Beijing Conference, the other two components being the Council and the General Assembly. The Commission, as the main body responsible for implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, had organized its work into 12 critical areas, reflecting the Beijing Platform. It had also set up a working group to elaborate an optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and was acting as the preparatory committee for the review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, to be held in the year 2000. The Council had just approved the Commission's proposal to convene a special session for the purpose of the review. In addition, at the suggestion of the Council, the Commission had decided to elect its Bureau at the end, rather than the beginning, of its sessions in order to allow its officers time to prepare for future sessions.

Turning to lessons learned with regard to ensuring integrated follow-up, she noted the value of the coordinated work programmes of the functional commissions - yet another Council recommendation that had helped the Commission to organize its work from a broader perspective. Thus, the Commission had provided input to the special session for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, held in 1997, and to the Commission on Human Rights on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Council, through its agreed conclusions on gender mainstreaming and the improved interaction between it and the commissions, had also given a tremendous boost to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. In that connection she referred to the joint meeting of the Bureaux of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Council,

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and to her presentation, for the first time ever, to the Commission on Human Rights, which had sparked a dialogue on the different approaches of the two commissions to the question of women's rights. She also welcomed the improved cooperation within the Secretariat, particularly the joint work plan between the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Failures, on the other hand, included the continuing lack of substantive exchanges and the weak linkages between the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Status of Women, particularly with regard to their respective resolutions on violence against women, and the lack of interaction between the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission for Social Development concerning the resolutions they had adopted within the context of the International Year of Older Persons. Moreover, despite the Council's efforts, the input provided by the Commission on the Status of Women to the special session to review the implementation of the Rio Conference had never been considered. She anticipated a similar lack of communication with respect to the five-year review of the International Conference on Population and Development, to be held in 1999, since the Bureau of the Commission on the Status of Women had thus far received no information on preparations in that regard. She also deplored the absence of interaction with the regional commissions. For example, none of the documentation prepared by the Commission on the Status of Women had been submitted to the Conference on African Women and Economic Development organized by the Economic Commission for Africa.

Direct contact between commission bureaux and conference preparatory committees was essential in order to guarantee that input by commissions was taken into account. Common planning under the Council's guidance was also necessary in order to ensure an exchange of experience and the coordination of national reports and the reports of the United Nations system in anticipation of the various review conferences. Lastly, she recommended broader dissemination of the work of the functional commissions and more active support of the Council in that regard. She hoped that the substantive session of the Council in July would provide an occasion to lay the groundwork for amassing all the knowledge and expertise of the United Nations system for the benefit of the review conferences scheduled for 1999 and 2000.

Mr. HYNES (Canada), speaking as Vice-Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights, said that the creation of the post of High Commissioner for Human Rights had been one of the most significant outcomes of the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993. He agreed with Ms. Flor on the need to draw common lessons and conclusions, but also with the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who, in an earlier meeting, had emphasized the importance of the distinctive roles of each of the functional commissions.

Unlike the themes of many of the other major conferences, the theme of human rights was unique in that it was a basic goal of the Charter of the United Nations and therefore long established. The Commission on Human Rights had a large number of standing items on its agenda covering an exceptional breadth of issues. Human rights was a cross-cutting theme par excellence, as it had arisen at all other major conferences, including those on the child, the environment, poverty and food. That dovetailed with the question of mainstreaming discussed by Ms. Flor. The Commission's broad-ranging agenda had readily accommodated the follow-up of the Vienna Conference without unduly disrupting its regular work. In 1994, an item on the consideration of the procedural aspects of the follow-up of the Vienna Conference had been added to the agenda; however, the substantive follow-up had not necessitated any changes.

One serious disadvantage of being an established body was the difficulty of adapting to evolving needs and circumstances. Moreover, where the Commission had indeed managed to break new ground, the Secretariat had been slow to respond, for example, with regard to the protection of indigenous peoples, minorities, internally displaced persons and children. Commission members had been unable to find practical ways to advance the right to development and economic, social and cultural rights, identified as top-priority areas at the Vienna Conference. A number of fundamental questions addressed by the World Conference had not been followed up, including the far-reaching mandate of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Progress with respect to the broadening of inter-agency coordination, the strengthening of the special procedures system, the provision of technical assistance for human rights, greater involvement of non-governmental organizations and the provision of adequate resources for human rights activities had been slow at best and, in some cases, non-existent.

On a positive note, the Commission on Human Rights, at its most recent session had taken a number of important initiatives. It had decided on the need

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for a special rapporteur dealing with economic, social and cultural rights and had established the post of Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty; it had also agreed on the need for an independent expert to report to the Working Group on the Right to Development, thereby redressing the past imbalance which had favoured civil and political rights. It had also taken action with respect to the rights of women and to combating violence against women and had held an unprecedented half-day special session in conjunction with the Commission on the Status of Women. Thus far, however, it had taken no other steps to ensure integrated follow-up with other functional commissions.

With regard to questions of basic institutional reform, the Commission, in addition to updating and streamlining its agenda, had launched a comprehensive inter-sessional review with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of its very complex network of subsidiary mechanisms. In that context, it would urge the Secretary-General, the Council and the General Assembly to ensure that budgetary resources for human rights programmes were commensurate with their expanding mandates. The Council was now in a strong position to encourage progress on the fundamental question of system-wide coordination and integration of human rights activities. That was also one of the mandates of the High Commissioner; however, the High Commissioner's role had not been readily accepted by other actors in the United Nations system. He welcomed the firm commitment of the Secretary-General to mainstreaming human rights and his authorization of the current High Commissioner, Mrs. Mary Robinson, to take action, including in the area of technical assistance for human rights. The Secretary-General had also demonstrated his commitment by chairing a panel of 19 department and agency heads or representatives during the most recent session of the Commission on Human Rights.

He further welcomed the document prepared by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) for the current panel discussion and hoped that the follow-up of ACC task forces would focus on human rights. The Council could make a significant contribution during the coordinated segment on human rights of its substantive session to be held in July. He hoped that both the sessions of the Council and the General Assembly, which were to consider the five-year review of the World Conference, would accelerate progress in the attainment of its goals.

The PRESIDENT invited the members of the Council to comment on the statements made by the panellists.

Mr. GOODERHAM (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Union, asked the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women whether she felt that the Council's agreed conclusions of 1997 on gender mainstreaming were being implemented within the United Nations system. Perhaps the Secretariat should play a more direct role in establishing linkages between functional commissions whose mandates overlapped. He also wondered whether the coordination of the work of the functional commissions would be enhanced if their members were all from permanent missions in New York or Geneva rather than on assignment from various capitals.

Mr. HAMDAN (Lebanon) requested clarification as to whether the institutional reform of the Commission on Human Rights with a view to broadening its agenda was a purely internal exercise or was being carried out in coordination with other United Nations entities.

Ms. FLOR (Germany), speaking as Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women, said that the extent to which the Council's agreed conclusions on gender mainstreaming were being implemented was hard to judge, as no report on the subject had yet been submitted by the Secretariat. In any case, that report would be submitted to the Council, and not necessarily to her Commission. That was a good example of de-linkage and of a case in which the functional commission in charge of an issue should be involved in, or at least informed of, the measures being taken to follow up the Council's agreed conclusions.

Because the Secretariat was the core repository of knowledge regarding the areas of concern and the work of the functional commissions, it was in a unique position to detect both areas of overlap and opportunities for fruitful interaction. It should therefore submit reports and proposals in that regard to the commissions.

Bureau members who were attached to permanent missions enjoyed the advantages of constant contact with the Secretariat and follow-up of activities throughout the year. They could take part in inter-sessional processes to complement the work of their commissions and could interact more easily with members of other commissions. On the other hand, the commissions also needed the expertise of bureau members who were based in their respective countries.

Mr. HYNES (Canada), speaking as Vice-Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights, said that the selection of bureau members should not be too rigid; the point was to take advantage of talent no matter where it was found. In reply to the representative of Lebanon, he noted that the Secretary-General had already spelled out his views on the need to mainstream human rights in the Secretariat, while a number of meetings had been held in the past year among specialized agencies dealing with human rights. The review to which he had referred was to be conducted by the Bureau of the Commission on Human Rights to consider how to improve the functioning of the Commission's subsidiary bodies.

Mr. CIVILI (Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs) said that the Organization's reforms would enhance the Secretariat's capacity to help coordinate the work of the functional commissions and the Council. For example, the new Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Executive Committees established by the Secretary-General, including the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, were important instruments for ensuring such coordination.

Ms. KARIM (Malaysia), speaking as Chairperson of the Commission on Population and Development, said that, each year since the International Conference on Population and Development, the Commission on Population and Development had met to discuss major thematic areas of the Conference. The Commission's work had been facilitated by the excellent cooperation among the United Nations Population Division, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and other agencies.

In preparing its work plans, the Commission took into account the issues to be considered by other commissions; for example, it had chosen gender, population and development as the theme of its meeting in the year 2000 so that its deliberations could constitute an input for the five-year review of the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women. The Commission received reports on the work and the decisions of other relevant entities, including the Economic and Social Council, particularly on cross-cutting issues. Moreover, it had begun to hold a mid-year inter-sessional meeting of its Bureau to ensure continuity between the incoming and the outgoing Bureau and to provide a forum for the preparation of the forthcoming session's agenda and documentation. At the 1997 inter-sessional meeting, the Bureau had drawn up a matrix to coordinate the Commission's work with that of other



functional commissions. At the Commission's 1998 session, the conduct of a technical panel discussion had expanded the Commission's role as a forum for the exchange of ideas, experiences and best practices at the global, regional and national levels. The results of such panel discussions should be shared with other functional commissions.

Among the mechanisms through which the various commissions and the Secretariat could coordinate and integrate the implementation of conference goals and recommendations were the exchange of documentation, reports on thematic discussions and reports of the commissions' sessions; collaboration among commissions on relevant issues; meetings of chairpersons; and coordination among secretariats and agencies. For example, her Commission and the Statistical Commission had been working together for 50 years, exchanging reports and taking each other's concerns into account. That type of work relationship could be fostered with other commissions. At the Commission's most recent session, the exchange of ideas and information between its Bureau and the Economic and Social Council had been very useful; such exchanges should be continued.

Mechanisms for the decentralization of coordination at the regional and country levels must be strengthened, especially in the areas of strategy and programme formulation, national capacity-building and resource mobilization. Such coordination should extend to intergovernmental mechanisms. Coordination among regional commissions in exchanging experiences and best practices was also important, as the proximity of those commissions to national policy makers increased the speed and effectiveness of the support they provided to countries. With respect to resource mobilization and South-South cooperation, the participants in a recent workshop had shared their experiences and concerns with respect to the targets of the International Conference on Population and Development and had formulated proposals for intercountry projects. South-South partnership should be further enhanced and supported.

All the commissions should consider thematic issues within the broader framework of social and economic development. The coordinating and advocacy role of the Council and of national planning commissions were important in that regard. The work programmes of the various commissions should be harmonized and mutually supportive, and a system of open consultation at all levels should be instituted to address common problems. The priorities, strategies and resource

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allocations decided upon at global conferences must be adjusted to reflect disparities between and within regions, as well as recent changes at the national and regional levels, such as the Asian economic crisis. She hoped that the significant strides already made in areas such as the reduction of infant and child mortality and the improvement of life expectancy would be followed by further gains achieved through coordination and synergy.

Mr. AL-KAYED (Vice-Chairman of the Group of Experts on Public Administration and Finance) recalled that the General Assembly, during its resumed fiftieth session, had explored the interdependence of global political, social and economic developments and their implications in terms of the need for more effective administrative systems to harness those challenges in support of sustainable development, and had adopted resolution 50/225 on the subject. Subsequently, the Meetings of Experts on the United Nations Programme in Public Administration and Finance had formulated strategies and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of that landmark resolution. In the light of that resolution and of the outcome of the United Nations global conferences held in the 1990s, the Thirteenth Meeting of Experts on the United Nations Programme in Public Administration and Finance, held in 1997, had adopted "Redesigning the State for socio-economic development and change" as its overall theme. That theme, with a special emphasis on the major global challenges highlighted by those conferences, had also been a focus of the recently concluded Fourteenth Meeting.

The need for global action to address emerging trends and challenges had also become a central theme of the Fourteenth Meeting. Within that overall context, the experts had paid particular attention to the relationship between public administration and the implementation of commitments made at recent major United Nations conferences, pursuant to paragraph 10 of General Assembly resolution 50/225. To build the necessary capabilities for enabling Member States to implement those commitments in an effective and coordinated manner, the United Nations should emphasize three types of activities: dissemination of information on critical issues and best practices, and provision of clearinghouse services to Governments; policy analysis and advisory services on translating conference commitments into policies, legislation and action; and articulation of standards of professionalism and accountability. In the context of regional integration, the United Nations should provide assistance in

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training public services, facilitating linkages within and among regions and encouraging information sharing and cross-fertilization. Popular participation in government administration was another crucial area, whose importance had been noted, inter alia, in Agenda 21, the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development and the Habitat Agenda.

The participants in the Fourteenth Meeting had noted the disparity between the resources available for post-conference implementation of commitments and the resources mobilized for pre-conference preparatory activities. The matter should be reviewed in close collaboration with the regional commissions, specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system, in the light of the overall need to strengthen coordination in the design, implementation and evaluation of public administration and public-sector programmes. Pursuant to paragraph 12 of General Assembly resolution 50/225, organizations of the system that dealt wholly or partially with public-administration issues had met during the Fourteenth Meeting to chart out a coordinated approach that would enhance cooperative advantages and result in more initiatives and publications. The Group of Experts was committed to initiating a dialogue with the functional commissions and other organizations of the United Nations system to ensure that the general strategy and specific programmes for redesigning and strengthening public administration were supportive of and complementary to the follow-up to the global conferences.

The PRESIDENT invited the members of the Council to comment on the statements made by the panellists.

Mr. GOODERHAM (United Kingdom) said he had not been aware that the resumed fiftieth session of the General Assembly was regarded as a United Nations global conference or that the Group of Experts on Public Administration and Finance was considered a functional commission of the Council, and asked for clarification on why they had been included in the Secretary-General's report (E/1998/19).

With respect to the 1999 five-year review of the implementation of the commitments made at the International Conference on Population and Development, the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women had stressed the desirability of ensuring that her Commission's inputs were factored into the preparations for that review. He asked whether the Chairperson of the Commission on Population and Development had any practical suggestions as to how

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those inputs could be incorporated. Lastly, he asked the representative of the Group of Experts on Public Administration and Finance how the United Nations programme in public administration and finance and the work of the Group of Experts were to be coordinated in a practical way with that of United Nations agencies, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), working at the field level.

Mr. LUNDBORG (Sweden) said that the Commission on Population and Development had set an excellent example by deciding to consider gender, population and development in the year 2000 so as to coincide with the five-year review of the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Other functional commissions should also ensure that the issues on their agendas coincided with the five-year reviews of global conferences. That would ensure integration of the expertise of all the functional commissions in the preparatory processes for those reviews. He was dissatisfied with the dull working format of the functional commissions, which consisted mainly of the reading of prepared speeches and involved little interactive discussion on experiences and problems. Wherever possible, members of the functional commissions should also participate in each other's meetings to discuss cross-cutting issues.

Mr. AL-KAYED (Vice-Chairman of the Group of Experts on Public Administration and Finance) said that the crucial issue, with regard to field-level coordination, was coordination between the United Nations and individual countries. Field research, the extraction of lessons from national and regional experiences and the application of that knowledge to similar situations were the most important mechanisms in that regard.

Ms. KARIM (Malaysia), speaking as Chairperson of the Commission on Population and Development, said that the comments by the representatives of the United Kingdom and Sweden were constructive and the Commission on Population and Development had indeed discussed the issues they had raised. The Commission had held an inter-sessional meeting of its Bureau at which a great deal of evaluation work had been carried out on how to make the Commission function better, and in that evaluation the problem of lengthy and boring statements had been prominent: it was sad but true that not everybody listened to everything that was said, so speakers had been given guidelines asking them to keep their statements short and focused, to avoid reciting the whole background of the

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situation in their countries, as they did every year, and to concentrate on telling the Commission about their successes, failures and problems.

The question of how much time should be spent on substantive, interactive discussion had also come up at the inter-sessional Bureau meeting; as a result, the Commission had organized a technical panel composed of four experts from the regions, and its discussions had been more interesting in that participants had spoken more spontaneously about their countries' situations. She hoped that that practice would continue.

It was possible that, at its 1998 inter-sessional meeting, the Bureau would discuss the problem of how the Commission on Population and Development would link up with the other Commissions; it was vital that it should link up with the Commission on the Status of Women in 1999 and 2000 so that the review of the International Conference on Population and Development could take into account the thematic presentation on women's health that would be discussed by the Commission on the Status of Women in 1999, and conversely so that the Commission on the Status of Women could take into account the thematic presentation on population, gender and development for the year 2000 to be produced by the Commission on Population and Development. She pointed out that although the exact mechanisms for the link would have to be discussed by the Bureau the secretariat of the Commission on Population and Development was commendably efficient in putting all the Commission's documentation into the form of electronic mail, which speeded up document assessment and the whole process of reporting.

Mr. CIVILI (Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs), replying to the question from the representative of the United Kingdom as to whether the General Assembly's resumed fiftieth session, when it had discussed public administration, was regarded as a special conference, said that although the resumed session had not been a global conference, it had still been a universal forum that had addressed important issues with major implications for development and other issues dealt with by other major conferences.

Although the Group of Experts on Public Administration was not a functional commission, at its latest session, the Group had considered as the main item on its agenda the way in which the follow-up to the resumed session of the General Assembly should relate to and be coordinated with the work of the functional

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commissions, and it had been thought useful for the Economic and Social Council to be apprised of the outcome of that discussion.

The PRESIDENT, commenting on the points raised by the United Kingdom representative, said that the Council's panel discussions were supposed to be for the purposes of interaction but so far there had been time for only four speakers. He therefore requested panellists to restrict their speaking time to 10 minutes, so as to allow more time for questions and discussion.

Mr. Sychou (Belarus), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. BIAOU (Benin), speaking as Vice-Chairman of the Commission on Sustainable Development, recalled that the Commission on Sustainable Development, set up pursuant to a recommendation by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, had first met in 1993. Its May 1998 session had been the first after the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, on Agenda 21, in June 1997. The special session had concentrated on sustainable development at all levels, with three essential components: economic development, social development and protection of the environment. Thus, the Commission's multi-year programme from 1998 to 2002 had been coordinated with the other functional commissions: the Commission on Sustainable Development did not have direct responsibility in areas such as poverty and population, which were covered by Agenda 21 but primarily fell within the purview of the Commission for Social Development and the Commission on Population and Development. The Commission on Sustainable Development was interested in those issues only in terms of their relationship with its own, restricted, agenda, specifically fresh water, industry and sustainable development.

The Bureau held regular inter-sessional meetings that involved the participation of many interested parties, including United Nations bodies, with the significant innovation that the new Bureau was elected to serve from the end of one regular session so that it could oversee the preparatory work for the next session: the current Bureau was transitional, in that it had been elected midway between sessions. He noted that the new practice for electing the Bureau had been referred to by the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women, and he encouraged others to follow the same practice.

He proposed that the chairpersons' summaries from inter-sessional working groups should be turned into draft decisions and conveyed to Governments at

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least six weeks before each regular session so that representatives could receive the necessary instructions from their capitals for the decision-making process to begin, for which process enough time should be allotted. Also, there must be regular, well-planned consultations between the Bureau and Member States on the preparations for each session, and thorny issues must be kept on the agenda so that everyone had the opportunity to speak. Further, documents had to be processed in such a way as to ensure that delegations received them at least six weeks before the beginning of each session.

In terms of the integrated and coordinated follow-up to conferences, the Bureau of the Council should hold a meeting at the beginning of each year with all the bureaux of the functional commissions to settle questions of integration and coordination, avoid duplication and determine the themes and initiatives each commission should undertake. An exchange of decisions and resolutions covering the same theme would facilitate their implementation; it would speed up decision-making and avoid repeating protracted negotiations and duplication of decisions.

Follow-up to major United Nations conferences should also take place on the regional, subregional and national levels, thereby avoiding waste of resources.

As the Commission on Sustainable Development had done with the most recent outgoing and incoming bureaux, other functional commissions too should ensure that their old and new bureaux met to exchange information on the major issues that needed follow-up and the themes that had to be covered jointly with other functional commissions.

Mr. FERNANDEZ (Spain), speaking as Chairman of the Commission for Social Development, referring to the questions put by previous speakers about how to avoid long and boring statements in the functional commissions, said that the Commission for Social Development had reduced the time available for statements and extended its dialogue with non-governmental organizations about what civil society expected Governments represented on the Commission to do. That dialogue had proved useful, and so in future the formal opportunities for statements would be further reduced and the less formal approach would be extended.

To strengthen coordination and integration in achieving the objectives of the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen and of the Commission for Social Development itself, the core issues emanating from the Summit must be

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made central to the global agenda. The World Bank and the International Labour Organization were beginning to talk about the social impact of financial crises, while the integration of employment policies into macroeconomic policy-making was another major issue discussed in Copenhagen. The Commission for Social Development had worked on those issues in 1997, but had not yet embarked on a global discussion.

He noted that at the previous meeting there had been a presentation about a joint effort by the United Nations with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the World Bank to develop a set of indicators. However, almost no attention had been given to indicators for employment or social integration, whereas the Copenhagen Summit had considered that people should be the central concern. Indicators were not an end, rather a means; some things were not susceptible to evaluation by means of indicators, while there was sometimes a lack of indicators because not enough resources had been put into determining them.

Greater integration was needed in following up conferences; the Copenhagen Summit had been special because it had provided for a Preparatory Committee reporting to the General Assembly with the Commission for Social Development as the support organ for the substantive work done pursuant to the Copenhagen Summit. That should promote integration with the Commission on the Status of Women in that Commission's follow-up to Beijing.

As to what the Commission for Social Development had done to integrate the follow-up to conferences, a major effort had been made: in three years the Commission had changed out of all recognition. It now had a multi-year agenda, with more items on it, focused on the Copenhagen process, and its programme of work had been honed. Much remained to be done, but the improvements from year to year were tangible.

He noted that the programmes of the functional commissions were coordinated, internally, on a year-to-year basis, and therefore coordination between them should take place at a time when each commission began its preparation for the next year - which, he noted, was already known as one of the most difficult periods for the chairpersons. Sometimes, however, a problem shared was a problem halved: each Commission's decisions at that time should be made known to all the others so that there could be cross-fertilization. However, coordination between the commissions' bureaux needed input from the

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Bureau of the Council. He proposed therefore that the chairpersons of the functional commissions should meet annually around 1 May and discuss preparations for the next year with the Council Bureau as a whole. The Council's substantive meetings in July should identify disparities and duplication between the various decisions in the reports from the commissions and so improve integration and coordination. Some of the most complex programmes were, however, not best dealt with on a year-to-year basis and should therefore be treated differently: too much time and effort was currently being spent on them.

Once follow-up work had been done in the commissions, it had to be carried on by the countries themselves. However good the work of the commissions in respect of follow-up to conferences, there also remained the problem of how the United Nations system should follow up national efforts. Whether or not every commission knew exactly what every other commission was doing, the information coming back from the field was currently very scant, and if that situation was to be remedied the Council must play a coordinating role.

To achieve that goal, the Council might, he suggested, issue an annual report on the outcome of the work done by the functional commissions on the follow-up to conferences, assisting the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Finance by familiarizing it with the functional commissions' work and ensuring genuine interaction between the Commissions and the Council. Indeed, such a report should be made available to Member States and to the media, the more so since the good work done by the Commissions needed more publicity.

The formal nature of the functional commissions' sessions made it difficult to disseminate the results to other interested bodies. The Council should therefore find faster and better ways of ensuring that dissemination took place.

Also, the Council should make better use of the results of the functional commissions' work in its own programme of work: success in that regard was currently patchy.

Mr. JARQUE (Mexico), speaking as Chairman of the Statistical Commission, said that to meet the many demands for statistical information, his Commission had adopted a rapid, open system of organizing its activities, enabling it to do many things in a reasonable time with the help of the world's most outstanding experts in the field. It met in plenary session only every other year, while its working groups, whose composition depended on the task in

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hand, working constantly. Participation in the working groups was voluntary, and all available technology was used to keep members in constant contact with each other. The groups reported to the Commission, with documents distributed to all members beforehand.

The Commission had a standing coordination group for statistical programmes and activities which continuously followed up the Commission's decisions and held its sessions in years when the Commission did not meet. The Commission's statistical activities subcommittee on the other hand reported to the Administrative Committee on Coordination, in which those parts of the Secretariat responsible for statistics were represented.

One of the Statistical Commission's priorities was to support efforts to achieve the goals of the various United Nations conferences. To that end, and on the premise that the world's information system was rooted in the various national systems, it had worked out strategies to provide statistical support for the conferences either directly or indirectly, by promoting the development of statistical capabilities in countries that were behind in that area; promoting international cooperation and technical assistance; standardizing statistical information at the global level; promoting the use of the most advanced technologies for statistical work; and coordinating the statistical activities of international bodies and agencies.

The resulting information benefited countries, international organizations and conferences. The Commission had also set up an expert group to analyse the statistical implications of the main United Nations conferences and ensure improved follow-up and coordination of the resulting statistical activities.

In the demographic and social field, the Statistical Commission had studied, defined and approved a minimum set of social indicators in order to provide better tools for monitoring the social programmes of action agreed at the various global conferences. The minimum set of social indicators guided the various national statistical offices as to the requirements for information needed to follow up the various programmes of action.

With a view to making an in-depth diagnosis of the end-of-century demographic and social situation, the Statistical Commission had developed a manual of recommendations for the year 2000 population and housing census that would have all the world's countries conducting a census and acquiring data in a

homogeneous manner so as to take a demographic "snapshot" of the world for the new millennium.

Integrating data on poverty was one of the greatest statistical challenges, to which the Commission had responded by setting up a group of specialists in poverty statistics. The group had developed tools such as quantifying poverty lines and measuring poverty on the basis of family assets. The Commission had adopted a classification of migrants and methods for calculating international migration flows and totals. The Commission was also instrumental in coordinating and integrating economic statistics of many kinds.

The Commission's work in the environmental area had resulted in an international methodological framework for measuring the environmental domestic product, with obvious implications for sustainable development. The Commission was working also on environmental statistics in general, with implications for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development follow-up.

The Commission was working also on monitoring scientific and technological progress. At the same time, it was trying to increase computer usage to improve statistics worldwide and provide the international community with the Commission's own output, making extensive use of the Internet to do so, as it did for many other purposes.

He noted that the Office of Internal Oversight Services, in paragraph 84 of its report (E/AC.41/1997/2), described the statistics programme as an example of the type of activity that the United Nations did well. However, to improve the Commission's efficiency in meeting the Council's needs, he proposed that, first, that there should be more frequent meetings to exchange information and details of programmes between the Council and the Statistical Commission. Such meetings could be institutionalized. Second, the Council should send its own representatives to the Commission's meetings. Third, the Council should promote large-scale multi-country statistical projects such as the year 2000 population and housing census. Fourth, the Statistical Commission should meet every year instead of every other year. Having twice as many but shorter sessions would speed response time, and there would be no budgetary implications if the sessions of the coordination group were converted into formal meetings of the Commission. Fifth, he called for the work of the statistics divisions in the United Nations system to be given higher priority in budgetary terms. After

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all, an input of statistical information was indispensable for achieving the noble purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Mr. QADER (Bangladesh), speaking as Chairman of the Commission on Human Settlements, said that the Economic and Social Council had provided clear guidelines for coordinated implementation of the results of recent conferences on population and development, on women and on social development, but had not done so with regard to the preparatory period or for follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). In contrast, the General Assembly had adopted several resolutions regarding the implementation of the Habitat II agenda, some of which specifically addressed the relationship among the General Assembly, the Council and the Commission on Human Settlements. To date, the Council had taken no action on any of the General Assembly's recommendations regarding the implementation of the Habitat II agenda.

In collaboration with numerous United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements had developed guidelines for resident coordinators on the implementation of the Habitat II agenda at the country level. Moreover, at its sixteenth session, the Commission itself had adopted two major resolutions on follow-up to Habitat II and on the role and revitalization of the Centre.

The Commission on Human Settlements hoped that during its seventeenth session, it would be provided with more information about actions that the Council would be taking to implement the relevant General Assembly resolutions, and also hoped that the Council would start playing its mandated coordinating role among the functional commissions and subsidiary bodies with respect to implementing the Habitat II agenda and strengthening the Commission's mandate. Moreover, the high-level segment for the Council's 1999 substantive session should focus on human settlements and the follow-up to and implementation of the Habitat II agenda, especially as the review conference on Habitat II was to take place in 2001. The Council might also recommend that the Centre should become a full member of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC).

The Commission on Human Settlements noted with concern that the work of the regional commissions did not give adequate priority to human settlement matters in their current medium-term plans, and called on the Council to review their programmes so as to address the implementation of the Habitat II agenda as called for in General Assembly resolution 51/177.

The Council should also provide comprehensive and integrated guidance to the Commission while duly incorporating the relevant recommendations of the General Assembly. Similar specific directives were needed for coordination between other relevant functional commissions and the Commission in order to implement the Habitat II agenda and subsequently to monitor that implementation. Despite their relatively isolated location in Nairobi, the Commission and the Centre should be assured equal standing with other functional commissions in the follow-up machinery. It would also be useful for the Council to recommend that ACC should establish an ad hoc inter-agency forum, in preparation for the five-year review of Habitat II in 2001.

The PRESIDENT invited the members of the Council to comment on the statements made by the panellists.

Mr. HAMDAN (Lebanon) requested that the statements made by the chairpersons of the functional commissions should be distributed to the members of the Council.

Ms. McDONALD (New Zealand) said that serious scheduling difficulties and great expense could be anticipated in any attempt to implement the suggestion that the bureaux of the functional commissions should meet with that of the Council. However, as had been suggested by the United Kingdom representative, the potential roles of the Secretariat and the Bureau of the Council in that work could be explored, and the Council Bureau could serve as a focal point to ensure that the work was carried out efficiently.

Mr. GOODERHAM (United Kingdom) said that he supported the suggestion of the representative of Lebanon with regard to circulating the texts of statements being delivered during the session. He also asked for the views of the Vice-Chairman of the Commission on Sustainable Development on the adequacy of the interaction between that Commission and the Commission on Social Development.

Mr. WINNICK (United States of America) supported the comments of the United Kingdom representative regarding advance circulation of the panellists' statements in order to allow more time for interaction. He suggested that the functional commissions should devote more of their time to interactive debate and be satisfied with a chairman's summary of that debate. Such a summary might also be more useful and comprehensible to other bodies within the United Nations system than a full negotiated text. He strongly endorsed a more active role for

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the Secretariat in ensuring that commissions had adequate access to relevant information from other commissions. Finally, he asked for clarification from the Secretariat with regard to whether a resolution from one commission could be cited in another commission before it had obtained formal Council endorsement.

Ms. MOORE (Canada) supported the comments of the three previous speakers on the need for interactivity and a balance between process and substance. She also pointed out the need to focus on emerging issues falling within the framework of the various conference documents in addition to implementing those documents, and suggested that all the commissions should consider including such an item on their agendas.

Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) said that many of the points raised by the panellists were being addressed in the context of the Council's review of its subsidiary bodies, and some were already being implemented by the Council Bureau in its interactions with the bureaux of the functional commissions. If that work could be completed in time for the Council's substantive session in July 1998, its outcome could be linked to that of the work being undertaken on the report of the Secretary-General on integrated and coordinated follow-up of major United Nations conferences.

Mr. BIAOU (Benin), speaking as Vice-Chairman of the Commission on Sustainable Development and replying to the representative of the United Kingdom regarding social development, emphasized that his Commission did not exclusively emphasize the ecological dimension in its work. For example, it had placed special emphasis on the elimination of poverty during its 1996 session, and had considered the social dimension of the integrated management of water resources in addition to the economic and ecological dimensions at its 1998 session. Moreover, the question of ensuring that commissions shared the beneficial results of each other's work deserved much more thorough analysis above and beyond its narrowly legal aspects, as such interaction would contribute greatly to facilitating the negotiations of the members as representatives of States as well as to making the work of the Commission more transparent.

Mr. FERNANDEZ (Spain), speaking as Chairman of the Commission for Social Development and replying to the representative of New Zealand, clarified that he had envisioned a meeting of the Council Bureau with just the heads of the functional commissions, or their designated representatives, and not their

full bureaux. However, there was a need for greater integration of the work of the commissions.

Mr. JARQUE (Mexico), speaking as Chairman of the Statistical Commission and responding to the comment of the representative of Canada regarding emerging issues, said that consideration of such issues was already a major element of the work of the Statistical Commission. Expert groups had been established to analyse such themes as the development of new technologies, but there remained a need for all commissions to identify such emerging issues more efficiently.

Mr. QADER (Bangladesh), speaking as Chairman of the Commission on Human Settlements, said that it was essential for delegations to have access to panellists' statements beforehand so as to be able better to assess and comment on them. He also noted that a process of interaction had been initiated between the Council Bureau and the bureaux of the New York-based functional commissions, which pointed up the imperative need for the Council to avoid selectivity and to consult with all the functional commissions regardless of location.

Mr. CIVILI (Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs) said that he fully supported the suggestion of the representative of the United States with regard to the role of the Secretariat in coordinating and disseminating information among the commissions, and that he would make further enquiries regarding the question of commission resolutions not yet adopted by the Council.

The meeting rose at 6.30 p.m.