



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
13 August 2019

Original: English

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## 2019 session

26 July 2018–24 July 2019

## June management segment

### Summary record of the 21st meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 6 June, at 3 p.m.

*President:* Ms. Juul (Vice-President) . . . . . (Norway)

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*In the absence of Ms. King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), Ms. Juul (Norway), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

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

## **Agenda item 18: Economic and environmental questions**

### **(I) Transport of dangerous goods (E/2019/63)**

1. **Mr. Hubert** (Chief, Dangerous Goods and Road Safety Management Section, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods and on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (E/2019/63), speaking via video link from Geneva, said that, pursuant to Council resolution 2017/13, the Secretariat had published the twentieth revised edition of the *Recommendations on the Transport of Dangerous Goods: Model Regulations*; amendment 1 to the sixth revised edition of *Recommendations on the Transport of Dangerous Goods: Manual of Tests and Criteria*; and the seventh revised edition of the *Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals*. The International Maritime Organization, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Organization for International Carriage by Rail and the Economic Commission for Europe had already amended their respective legal instruments on the transport of dangerous goods to give effect to the recommended new provisions. Many States had also updated their legislation applicable to domestic or regional transport accordingly.

2. The Committee urged the Secretary-General to collect more information about the status of implementation of the Recommendations on the Transport of Dangerous Goods worldwide in respect of the transport of dangerous goods by road, rail or inland waterways, applying the methods that the International Maritime Organization and the International Civil Aviation Organization used for maritime and air transport, given that little information on national implementation was available on States that did not participate in the work of the Committee. In particular, the Secretary-General should seek information from all Member States concerning the national competent authorities entitled to certify that a packaging design type met the United Nations construction and performance recommendations. The relevant information collected thus far was available on the website of the Economic Commission for Europe.

3. Some 70 countries, including the major producers of chemical products, had implemented or were working to implement the provisions of the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals, including through the revision of legal texts, standards and guidelines. Additionally, in accordance with the recommendations of the Committee, countries that had already implemented the System were amending national or regional legal instruments to incorporate the regular updating of the System. Within the United Nations system, the development and updating of guidance, training and resource materials had been ongoing during the reporting period, and several capacity-building activities or projects supported by Governments or the private sector had been carried out.

*Draft resolution: Work of the Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods and on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals*

4. **The President** invited the Council to take action on the draft resolution contained in part I of the report (E/2019/63).

5. *The draft resolution was adopted.*

### **(a) Sustainable development (E/2019/33; E/2019/L.11)**

6. **Ms. Fukuda-Parr** (Vice-Chair, Committee for Development Policy), introducing the report on the twenty-first session of the Committee for Development Policy (E/2019/33) said that the current levels of inequality were unacceptable and unsustainable, and climate change was a major factor in the disempowerment of communities. Moving towards inclusiveness and equality would require overturning processes. With little more than a decade left for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, there was an urgent need to rethink the factors that determined the direction of investment and innovation; the terms under which people were included in production, consumption and financial systems; and the distribution of the benefits, costs and risks of economic activity. There was a window of opportunity for a transformation grounded in equality, inclusion and human rights, where both the empowerment of those at risk of being left or pushed behind and the mechanisms that enabled the concentration of wealth and power at the top were addressed. It was not a matter of simply spending on social protections and investments to remedy problems; the drivers of inequality and exclusion must be directly addressed.

7. The Committee had continued its analysis of the voluntary national review and concluded that reviews could become more effective instruments to share lessons learned and promote mutual learning with the inclusion of more explicit and detailed discussions of national strategies for implementing the 2030 Agenda. Substantive coverage of the voluntary national reviews should be more comprehensive, especially since the 2030 Agenda was intended to be an integrated approach to sustainable development.

8. The Committee had also discussed the comprehensive review of the least developed country criteria, with the aim of finalizing a refined set of criteria in 2020 that could be applied at the 2021 triennial review of the least developed country category. The Committee had reviewed the development progress of countries that were graduating or had graduated from the least developed country category, noting that none of the countries appeared at risk of falling back to that category. However, the Committee had highlighted the vulnerability of Vanuatu to economic and environmental shocks and remained concerned at the continuing imbalance between the per capita income and the level of human assets in Equatorial Guinea and Angola, as well as the macroeconomic challenges caused by their overreliance on the oil sector.

9. The Committee had noted that the least developed country category had been useful in attracting political support for the least developed countries, but had led to only meagre additional assistance, even from the United Nations development system entities. In that regard, the Committee urged the United Nations development system organizations to use the least developed country category more in programming and budgeting and to develop relevant common guidelines. The Committee had also noted with concern that most United Nations development system entities did not have specific graduation support programmes or mechanisms, and that many least developed countries were concerned about the prospect of losing international support measures and needed an incentive to graduate from the category. The Committee had therefore decided to pilot a series of new recommendations aimed at strengthening support for graduating and graduated countries.

10. The Committee had proposed that the theme “Expanding productive capacity for sustainable development” should be used as the organizing framework of the new programme of action for the least developed countries and that the programme of action should be meaningfully aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.

*Draft resolution E/2019/L.11: Report of the Committee for Development Policy on its twenty-first session*

11. **The President** said that, in her capacity as Vice-President, she had submitted draft resolution [E/2019/L.11](#) on the basis of informal consultations. It had no programme budget implications.

12. *Draft resolution E/2019/L.11 was adopted.*

#### (e) Environment ([A/74/25](#))

13. **Mr. Ahmad** (Director, New York Liaison Office, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)), introducing the report of the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP on its fourth session ([A/74/25](#)), said that the session, held in Nairobi under the theme “Innovative solutions to environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production”, had been attended by representatives of 173 Member States and of a number of United Nations system entities, secretariats of environmental conventions, civil society, the scientific community and other stakeholders. Several scientific reports on the state of the global environment had been launched in support of environmental policy development. All of the reports had unequivocally called for urgent action and strengthened cooperation to reverse negative environmental trends and restore planetary and human health. During the high-level segment, ministers of environment and other leaders had engaged in dialogues on environmental challenges related to poverty and natural resources management; life cycle approaches to resource efficiency, energy and waste management; and innovative business development in a time of rapid technological change.

14. A main outcome of the United Nations Environment Assembly was a ministerial declaration in which Member States had expressed their determination to scale up efforts to overcome common environmental challenges; advance sustainable consumption and production patterns, including through circular economy and other sustainable economic matters; undertake action to restore and protect marine and coastal ecosystems; support UNEP in developing a global environmental data strategy by 2025; and address the damage to ecosystems caused by the unsustainable use of plastic products, including by significantly reducing the manufacture and use of single-use plastic products by 2030. The Assembly had also adopted 23 resolutions, including on marine litter and microplastics; innovative pathways to achieve sustainable consumption and production; food loss and waste; promoting gender and equality and the

empowerment of women and girls in environmental governance; and the poverty-environment nexus.

15. The institutional links between the General Assembly and the Council should be leveraged to achieve the outcomes of the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly and contribute to implementation of the partnership-based 2030 Agenda. In that regard, Member States might wish to invite the United Nations Statistical Commission and the Commission on Science and Technology for Development to support UNEP in the development of a global environmental strategy; call on Member States and all relevant United Nations bodies to contribute to the implementation of the UNEP plan “Towards a pollution free planet”; and follow up on the Secretary-General’s request for proposals on the sustainability, predictability and stability of the funding of the UNEP governing body, in accordance with General Assembly resolution [73/260](#).

**(i) Geospatial information (E/2018/46)**

*Action on the recommendation contained in the report of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (E/2018/46)*

16. **The President** invited the Council to take action on the draft decision contained in chapter I, section A of the report.

*Section A*

*Draft decision: Report of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management on its eighth session and provisional agenda and dates for the ninth session of the Committee*

17. *The draft decision was adopted.*

**(m) Assistance to third States affected by the application of sanctions**

18. **The President** said that no advance documentation had been submitted under the sub-item and no draft proposal was before the Council.

**Agenda item 19: Social and human rights questions**

**(e) United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

19. **Mr. Towle** (Deputy Director, New York Office, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)), reporting on the coordination aspects of the work of UNHCR, said that, at the end of 2018, there had been over 74 million persons of concern to UNHCR, including refugees, internally displaced

persons, returnees and stateless persons, and well over 13 million people had been newly displaced internally and across borders. New and ongoing conflicts continued to challenge the response capacity of UNHCR. At the same time, progress towards durable solutions remained limited. In 2018, an estimated 590,000 refugees had been able to return to their homes, a slight decrease over the previous year, and the gap between needs and actual resettlement opportunities exceeded 90 per cent. With global displacement continuing to rise and limited solutions in sight, efforts to ensure comprehensive and predictable responses to large-scale movements of refugees and to ease the burden on host countries, in the spirit of international responsibility-sharing, remained critical.

20. The affirmation of the global compact on refugees by the General Assembly in December 2018 marked a new stage in the global effort to deliver more inclusive and sustainable responses to refugee situations that better met the needs of refugees and their host communities. The global compact would guide the continued application of comprehensive responses in the 15 countries that had pioneered the approach since 2016. UNHCR was working closely with States and a wide range of key stakeholders to translate the global compact into concrete action.

21. UNHCR continued to engage with United Nations partners in a number of key areas, including in support of the Secretary-General’s reform efforts. In the context of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, UNHCR led the “cluster system”, working closely with the humanitarian country teams, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Organization of Migration and some 350 other partners to coordinate the protection, shelter, camp management and camp coordination clusters in 26 countries facing situations of internal displacement. UNHCR also supported inter-agency efforts in a number of other policy and operational areas, such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Humanitarian System-Wide Scale-Up Protocols, which sought to strengthen the response to sudden onset crises, where the humanitarian community’s capacity to coordinate and deliver assistance and protection did not match the scale, complexity and urgency of the situation. UNHCR had also worked closely with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination Task Force on addressing sexual harassment, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and other partners on efforts to address sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, in line with the Secretary-General’s commitment to combat sexual misconduct.

22. The UNHCR partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP) had resulted in joint principles for targeting assistance and a global data-sharing agreement. In December 2018, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs had agreed on key principles for a common cash platform, in line with commitments under the Grand Bargain on humanitarian financing. In January 2019, the High Commissioner for Refugees and the Director General of the International Organization of Migration had issued a joint letter outlining the distinct roles and responsibilities of each organization and areas for collaboration in situations involving both refugees and migrants.

23. UNHCR had worked on joint regional planning and analysis, and on national protection and solutions strategies developed under the leadership of the regional refugee coordinators. For example, in 2018 UNHCR had concluded regional refugee response plans for Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria and South Sudan, as well as the 2019 regional refugee and migrant response plan for the Venezuela situation. The Syria regional refugee and resilience plan, led by UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme, had set an example for addressing the needs of refugees and host countries and communities within a single multi-agency regional plan.

24. The work of UNHCR with development partners and financial institutions had continued to progress, including coordination with the World Bank on registration and identity-management projects and the development of dedicated financing instruments to ease the pressure on host countries. Progress had also been made on the establishment in Copenhagen of the UNHCR-World Bank Group Joint Data Centre on Forced Displacement, with the aim of improving the generation and analysis of household-level socioeconomic data on refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless populations, and thus enhancing the ability of stakeholders to make evidence-based programming decisions.

25. UNHCR continued to support United Nations development reforms centred on the Sustainable Development Goals, emphasizing the importance of strengthened partnerships and cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme. In an increasing number of operations, UNHCR was seeking opportunities to include refugees in national education and health systems, including through a partnership with the International Labour Organization. Recognizing the critical role played by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in providing humanitarian assistance and reaching populations of concern, UNHCR was

committed to reaching its Grand Bargain target to provide 25 per cent of its programme expenditures to local and national responders by 2020, and had provided 22 per cent in 2018. A number of NGO partners had participated in joint UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP initiatives aimed at harmonizing and simplifying funding processes.

26. UNHCR partnerships with the private sector, cities, faith-based organizations, sports entities and refugee youth were helping to strengthen protection and solutions, and foster innovative approaches to forced displacement and statelessness. The key role of cities and local authorities in supporting solutions for refugees had been highlighted at the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges in December 2018. That collaboration was increasingly important as more than half of the world's refugee populations lived in urban areas.

27. Internally, UNHCR had embarked on a major transformation aimed at strengthening decision-making and accountability at the point of delivery through decentralization and regionalization processes. That reflected its commitment to remain field-oriented and was in line with the Secretary-General's broader reform efforts to promote greater efficiencies within the United Nations. The initiative would empower UNHCR operations to respond faster and more flexibly, especially at the onset of large-scale emergencies.

28. A robust commitment by the international community to implement the global compact on refugees would be critical going forward. As foreseen in the compact, the first Global Refugee Forum would take place in Geneva in December 2019, providing States and partners with an opportunity to announce concrete contributions towards the objectives of the global compact, exchange good practices and take stock of progress and gaps, ultimately securing protection for those in need and helping to build a better future for the displaced.

**(f) Human rights (A/74/55; E/2019/22 and E/2019/52)**

29. **Mr. Mokhiber** (Director, New York Office of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights), introducing the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on economic, social and cultural rights (E/2019/52), said that the report examined the link between universal health coverage and human rights. More than half of the global population lacked access to essential health care, which had a direct impact on the ability of communities to flourish and societies to achieve sustainable development. Inequality,

discrimination and poverty were major causes of exclusion from access to quality health care, and wide disparities in access abounded between and within countries and regions. The high-level meeting of the General Assembly on universal health coverage, to be held on 23 September 2019, was an extraordinary opportunity for Member States to develop a road map to universal health coverage, firmly anchored in the rights to health, social security and other health-supporting human rights. Against that background, the High Commissioner had decided that the report on economic, social and cultural rights would assess the contribution that a human rights framework could make to the conceptualization and implementation of universal health coverage and highlight key human rights principles that should guide public health policy in that area. In line with the commitment to “leave no one behind” set out in the 2030 Agenda, Member States must integrate the right to health and other human rights into their discourse and policy on health coverage. In that regard, the report highlighted the normative value of human rights in assessing the availability, accessibility and good quality of health services, facilities and goods. A human rights framework also provided clear guidance on the meaning of universality: health care and services should not be limited to those able to pay or who benefited from employer-based schemes.

30. The principle of non-discrimination provided that universal health coverage and its protection should be made available to everyone, including non-nationals, such as migrants, and other often excluded groups, such as older persons, persons with disabilities and persons living with rare diseases. The complex challenges of implementing universal health coverage required an approach that encompassed the underlying determinants of health and embraced human rights principles and standards. That would require, for example, reorientation of public health policy towards rights-compliant models of universal health coverage. Strong political leadership would also be critical to bring about necessary policy changes, in partnership with an informed and engaged stakeholder base. In that regard, States should conduct regular reviews of their policy frameworks to identify gaps in health coverage and social protection, and assess the extent to which they were in conformity with health-related rights. In particular, States should ensure that legal frameworks addressed discrimination in access to health care and adopt national plans for the progressive realization of the right to health and the right to social security that mainstreamed universal health coverage in both the health and social security sectors. Universal health coverage was not merely an economic or development concern; it was a matter of social justice, equality and

the enjoyment of human rights. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights stood ready to work with all States and stakeholders to review laws and policies and facilitate the exchange of good practices that supported the implementation of a human rights-based approach to universal health coverage.

31. Introducing the report on the sixty-third and sixty-fourth sessions of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (E/2019/22), he said that the Committee had opened the sixty-third session jointly with the Human Rights Committee to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as both bodies aimed to ensure that the rights set out in the Declaration corresponded with lived realities. The two Committees had also met to explore ways of enhancing collaboration, taking into account the current reporting burden for States parties and duplication of work among the Committees, and bearing in mind the 2020 General Assembly review of the treaty body system. That collaboration had led to a proposal to develop a substantive statement on trade union rights, as protected under article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and article 8 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

32. The Committee had considered the first reports submitted under the simplified reporting procedure made available to a few States parties on a pilot basis. The positive outcome of the resulting dialogues had led the Committee to extend the simplified reporting procedure to the States parties with the longest reporting history with the Committee. The Committee hoped to further extend the procedure to more States, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/268, although that was contingent on adequate resources being allocated for the preparation of lists of issues prior to reporting.

33. In October 2018, the Committee had held a general discussion on science and economic, social and cultural rights, as part of the consultative process towards drafting a general comment on the topic. In a statement on the publication of the special report entitled *Global Warming of 1.5°C* of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Committee had described climate change as a massive threat to the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, which States parties were required to respect and protect.

34. With regard to the Committee’s consideration of individual communications under the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, deliberations had included a determination of circumstances under which the Committee had competence to examine violations that

had not been invoked by the author of a given complaint. The Committee had also analysed the content of the right to social security, in particular the right to a retirement pension, and the impact of the lack of comprehensive non-contributory pension schemes, including in respect of gender-based discrimination. The number of communications registered had surged by more than 400 per cent compared with the previous reporting period, exacerbating the already critical lack of resources for the Committee's work under the Optional Protocol.

35. Introducing the report of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on its seventeenth to twentieth sessions (A/74/55), he said that, during the reporting period, the Committee had held dialogues with 28 States parties and adopted related concluding observations. Under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Committee had continued to consider individual communications, registered 18 communications and carried out inquiry procedures with respect to two States parties.

36. Most notably, the Committee had adopted three general comments, which constituted authoritative guidance to assist States parties in their implementation of the provisions of the Convention. That included general comment No. 5 (2017) on living independently and being included in the community, which addressed the State's obligation to ensure every individual's enjoyment of the right to personal autonomy and self-determination and the principle of full and effective participation in society. After having held some 80 dialogues with States parties, the Committee had noted that State policies continued to approach disability through charitable or medical models, despite their incompatibility with the Convention, demonstrating a failure to acknowledge persons with disabilities as full subjects of rights. Against that backdrop, the Committee had adopted general comment No. 6 (2018) on equality and non-discrimination, which set out a framework of inclusive equality for persons with disabilities based on human dignity, human diversity and human rights, and clarified concepts like direct, indirect and intersectional discrimination and reasonable accommodation. The Committee had also adopted general comment No. 7 (2018) on the participation of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention, in which it recognized the value of the lived experiences of persons with disabilities and their knowledge of the rights to be implemented. That general comment also included a recommendation to States parties to consider the general

principles of the Convention in advancing the 2030 Agenda. To mark the 10 years since the entry force of the Convention, the Committee had included as an annex to the report an analysis of the Committee's activities and the development of its jurisprudence.

37. Referring to the treaty body system more generally, he said that treaty bodies had a number of concerns related to the current budgetary situation. If resources were not made available in time, a number of treaty bodies would have to postpone or even cancel upcoming sessions scheduled to take place in the second half of 2019. Additionally, the 25 per cent cut in the budget for travel of high-level experts disproportionately affected the work of treaty bodies and would have a direct negative impact on rights holders. He urged Member States to seize the 2020 General Assembly review of the treaty body system as an opportunity to ensure allocation of the regular budget resources the treaty bodies needed to fulfil their mandates. A weakening of the treaty body system would undermine the entire United Nations human rights architecture at a time when a pushback against human rights protection was unfolding across the world.

38. **Ms. Khusanova** (Russian Federation) said that the primary objective of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was to consider the national reports of States parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In that regard, the report on the Committee's sixty-third and sixty-fourth sessions (E/2019/22) showed that the Committee had managed to achieve the difficult task of minimizing the number of reports that went unconsidered. Those results had been possible because of the efforts made to optimize the Committee's reporting procedures, but also because the Committee had received additional meeting time in 2013 and 2014. In that context, it could be concluded that the Committee did not use its time in an optimal manner. In 2018, the Committee had held around 10 meetings with NGOs, academic bodies and United Nations entities instead of making more rational use of its time by meeting with States parties.

39. Her delegation was also concerned about the growing trend whereby Committee members would adopt general comments and statements which would then be imposed on States as new binding standards. That constituted an arbitrary interpretation of experts' powers. It should be recalled that treaty bodies had no norm-setting functions and their statements were only the private opinions of individuals. Furthermore, as was clear from annex II of the report, the various experts' opinions were not all given equal consideration. Lastly, her delegation had serious questions about the holding of joint meetings of the Committee on Economic, Social

and Cultural Rights and the Human Rights Committee and their plan to prepare a joint consolidated list of questions for reporting States. Such attempts to merge the work of the two bodies constituted a blatant disregard for the provisions of their founding legal documents.

40. **The President** proposed that the Council should take note of report of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on its sixty-third and sixty-fourth sessions ([E/2019/22](#)) and the report of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on its seventeenth to twentieth sessions ([A/74/55](#)).

**(h) Comprehensive implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**

41. **The President** said that the General Assembly, in its resolution [62/220](#), had decided that the Assembly, the Council and the Human Rights Council should constitute a three-tiered intergovernmental process for the comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

42. She informed the Council that no documentation or draft proposals had been submitted on the item.

*The meeting rose at 4.20 p.m.*