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Summary record of the 16th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 22 May 2019, at 10 a.m.

President: Ms. Azucena (Vice-President) . . . . (Philippines)

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In the absence of Ms. King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), Ms. Azucena (Philippines), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 7: Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation (*continued*)

  (a) **Follow-up to policy recommendations of the General Assembly and the Council** (*continued*) (A/74/73-E/2019/14, A/74/73/Add.1-E/2019/14/Add.1, A/74/73/Add.2-E/2019/14/Add.2 and A/74/73/Add.3-E/2019/14/Add.3; E/2019/62)

1.   **The Deputy Secretary-General** said that the regional review was a critical component of efforts to reposition the United Nations development system. Stepping up the Organization's regional response was key to helping countries achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. More than ever before, the greatest challenges, such as climate, trade and health, transcended borders. That made regional and subregional cooperation absolutely essential. It was possible to build upon the work of the past decades. The United Nations had an unmatched array of assets and policy capacity at the regional level, but it must do more to make sure that those assets were optimally deployed. It was important to clarify the value added in each region – as a system – and ensure that regional assets were strengthened, made much more accessible and used to support Member States in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

2.   The Secretary-General had proposed five recommendations to ensure more effective collaboration among all United Nations entities at the regional level and to serve as common ground for advancing change. First, a unified regional collaborative platform would be created to integrate expertise scattered across United Nations entities in support of the Goals; it would function as a unifying mechanism to harness regional assets and translate the outcomes of the regional sustainable development forums into concrete programmatic responses by regional entities. It would also include a policy and an operational pillar, drawing on the respective mandates and strengths of regional economic and social commissions and other regional offices of the United Nations development system. The Secretary-General was asking the Development Coordination Office to serve as the secretariat for those platforms, providing independent leadership to support their work and drawing systematically on the policy role of regional commissions and the operational assets of

other entities, as well as on existing structures to boost region-specific understanding.

3.   Second, the Secretary-General was offering ways to pool the policy expertise that was scattered across United Nations entities in the regions to provide countries with relevant policy support that could be accessed easily and deployed quickly. Knowledge management hubs would be established to provide a portal for Member States and United Nations country teams so that they could more easily access the broad menu of policy expertise available in each region to respond to regional specificities.

4.   Third, there would be greater transparency and better reporting of system-wide results at the regional level. The proposals advanced by the Secretary-General were fully implementable and would provide much more visibility with regard to what happened in the regions and the connection to the country offices. Fourth, the Secretary-General had asked her to work with all United Nations development entities to identify areas where common back offices and co-location could enhance regional administrative functioning and leverage economies of scale. The goal was not to take away or reduce capacities but rather to strengthen the United Nations response, maximize the impact of its investments and save resources that could be redeployed to priority sustainable development needs in each region.

5.   Fifth, the Secretary-General would launch a region-by-region change management process to consolidate capacities relating to data, statistics and other analytical functions to reduce duplication and create synergies. The regional review had looked at the specific characteristics of each region, as well as the commonalities across them. The five areas of transformation would benefit all regions equally, but implementation must be tailored to each region and responsive to specific challenges and opportunities to deliver results on the 2030 Agenda. The intention was to use the feedback given in the days to come to develop an individual implementation plan in each region to take forward the Secretary-General's proposals.

6.   Previous reform efforts had often focused exclusively on the country level without addressing structural impediments to a more effective regional response. The diversity of the Organization's work across regions, along with natural anxieties and different perspectives across the membership, might have made previous discussions elusive and posed various challenges, but she was convinced that the current context was unique. Humanity's boldest agenda – the Sustainable Development Goals – could not be achieved

without a stronger regional response, and the United Nations was currently well advanced in a reform effort that had showed the world it was both willing and ready to change. Together, incredible steps at an incredible pace had been taken to reposition the United Nations. An additional step forward could be taken, maintaining the momentum and the ambition that Member States had set for the system. At the end of the day, everyone shared the same expectations for the regional level: more results for people and more value for money. The United Nations had the assets and certainly the leadership and expertise to make that happen. What was needed was political will and leadership at all levels to take it forward. She looked very much forward to feedback from Member States and their support to continue delivering on the mandates entrusted to the Organization by them.

Panel discussion: "Getting the regional architecture right: a round-table on the way forward"

7. **Mr. Mayaki** (Chief Executive Officer of the New Partnership for Africa's Development), moderator, said that the Organization was at a critical juncture and that most of the processes embedded in the reform were designed to strengthen capacities at the country level in order to deliver better on the 2030 Agenda.

8. **Mr. Bin Momen** (Observer for Bangladesh), panellist, said that the regional architecture of the United Nations development system played an important role in carrying out the Organization's various mandates. The regional economic commissions contained a wealth of information, expertise and assets and were the best place to address the multi-country challenges and provide in-country integrated support to programme countries to implement the Sustainable Development Goals. Nevertheless, the regional work of the United Nations needed to foster better coordination, communication and collaboration. The new generation of country teams needed to be dovetailed with the regional economic commissions to better leverage regional assets and expertise in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the country level. That could be achieved through both vertical integration and more coherent horizontal collaboration. Unified mechanisms in each region would foster better coordination on sustainable development across the United Nations entities operating at the regional level. The proposed regional collaborative platforms needed to set holistic agendas as part of the specificities of each region or subregion, but they should not lose sight of regional and country priorities. Partnerships with existing Member State-driven regional and subregional

initiatives would be worth examining. In addition, the modalities of operation of the platforms should be time mapped with some sort of review provisions.

9. The Secretary-General's proposals on repositioning on a region-by-region basis had great merit, as each regional entity had evolved in different ways depending on its priorities and the specificities of the region. Such proposals needed to be put into action, with specific options suitable for each region. Engaging with the multiple actors of the regional architecture, namely, the regional economic commissions, regional teams of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, the United Nations country team and the resident coordinator, was difficult for many developing countries when there were also multiple implementation ministries on the side of national Governments. A single dedicated interface with national Governments would therefore be better suited to addressing such development coordination challenges; in that regard, a role for the regional collaborative platforms could be envisaged. Line ministries or national implementation authorities sometimes found it difficult, given their limited capacities, to deal with the multiple United Nations entities at the country level and their overlapping mandates and projects. In that regard, country teams and the regional collaborative platforms could play a useful role in avoiding some of the duplication and bringing about more efficiency in the system.

10. He welcomed the retention of focus in the regional approach on the common challenges of developing countries. While launching transparent and results-based management at the regional level was crucial, it was important not to introduce too many initiatives and to avoid making the regional architecture too loaded. A centralized function through the Development Coordination Office, which should function as the secretariat, was needed to streamline reporting lines and reduce coordinating costs across agencies. The original mandates of regional economic commissions needed to be preserved, however, so that they enjoyed autonomy to pursue their priorities and plans in consultation with national Governments. With regard to revamping the regional architecture, clarity on how to address funding issues was needed, along with better partnership with regional international financial institutions. The United Nations regional system needed to reach out to the private sector and academia, which could provide invaluable insights. Regional economic commissions could organize multi-stakeholder workshops, conferences and other events to exchange ideas and approaches to sustainable development challenges. It was fundamental to ensure national ownership and

leadership in the operations of the revamped regional architecture. Member States should be consulted in all discussions as they took place. More clarity was needed on the review of the regional-level approaches, including options on a region-by-region basis. Any arrangement undertaken should not compromise the prerogative of Governments to communicate directly with the regional entities.

11. **Mr. Leenknegt** (Head of Unit, Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of Belgium), discussant, said that he fully concurred with the point about region-by-region clarity; the regional review had not yet delivered on that promise. Paradoxically, the review of multi-country offices offered more region-by-region options and tailored measures than the regional review. Using regional collaborative platforms as a single interface with Governments could be reflected upon. The question was whether that was the main purpose for which they had been designed, whether it would be a question of bringing structures together – the regional review spoke of absorbing existing coordination under a joint secretariat of the Development Coordination Office – or something more than that, or whether layers of responsibility could be added to the platforms.

12. **Ms. Bárcena** (Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and Coordinator for the Regional Economic Commissions), panellist, said that cooperation, interaction and mutual support among the regional commissions and the resident coordinators was already happening. It was as though a wall had fallen once the reform had begun and everyone had started working together in a mutually beneficial way. The most valuable commonality of the regional commissions was their convening power. They were able to bring together intergovernmental sectoral bodies with Member States to discuss issues of great importance at both the regional and subregional levels, such as statistics, gender and population, and identify areas that required regional integration and cooperation. The regional forums for sustainable development allowed for the identification of gaps and barriers to implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in each region, ways of reducing technological and trade asymmetries and opportunities to mobilize resources. Budgets for implementing the 2030 Agenda might not be enough, but there were other areas of opportunity that could be addressed, such as tax evasion and climate change. The nexus between development, humanitarian and migration could be built on.

13. Regional forums and commissions had close relationships with non-United Nations entities such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Caribbean Community, the Organization of American States and the African Union. The regional forums on sustainable development had become a locus for peer learning among similar countries to discuss voluntary national reports, gaps and barriers. They also brought together four actors: the implementing agencies of Member States; permanent representatives in New York; agencies, funds and programmes; and other stakeholders, such as the private sector, civil society and resident coordinators. The regional forums had become a community of knowledge and practice, which was important for agenda-setting. The proposed regional collaborative platforms should meet back-to-back with the regional forums at least once a year to take advantage of the chance to interact with Member States, an opportunity which did not currently exist.

14. The regional collaborative platforms should be decentralized: in the regions, serviced and closely coordinated by the regional commissions on the policy side and by the Development Coordination Office on the operational side. That might be a challenge, especially when the two entities were not in the same location. For example, in the Latin American and Caribbean region, ECLAC was in Santiago and the Development Cooperation Office was in Panama, but mechanisms for working together could be found, as had been the case in her region. A merged team of regional commissions and development coordination offices was needed to work on the policy and regional side, but that should be done in the regions. Organizing with other agencies, funds and programmes could be done through country-led, inter-agency, issue-based coalitions. For example, a coalition led by the International Labour Organization could focus on the future of work, but everyone should participate. Such coalitions should come to the regional collaborative platforms to share their findings. A region-by-region approach, with each region defining its own issue-based coalition, was needed. Cross-cutting issues of great importance, such as financial, fiscal, trade and gender issues, should be led by the regional collaborative platforms and common positions prepared. There was a need to end the entrenched false dichotomy between policy and operations. Successful regional collaborative platforms depended on building on existing capacities and offering proper leadership, but the platforms also needed to report to Member States and the Economic and Social Council, region by region, once a year.

15. With regard to regional knowledge hubs on statistics and data, the five regional commissions had

already designed regional forums, in the form of Sustainable Development Goal gateways, under the guidance of the Statistics Commission. Those gateways provided comparable data and were in the process of being linked to the Member States. Agencies, funds and programmes were working with Member States to present information and build their own capacities. An example of the region-by-region approach was the decision of Member States in the Latin American and Caribbean region to adopt a Caribbean First strategy, which required a subregional approach to cooperate with middle-income countries and small island developing States. A task force with the banking sector had just been created, along with an integrated development plan for North and Central America and Mexico, involving Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Mexico, to change the paradigm of migration from a national issue to a human security one, looking at migration from a human perspective and following it through its full cycle. ECLAC had been asked to identify the structural causes of such migration and put together programmes on infrastructure and social protection.

16. The regional commissions had already gone through a lot of efficiency gains, and budgetary suffering. The budget for all five commissions amounted to $300 million, or 1 per cent of the total regional United Nations development system budget. Since they were part of the Secretariat, they were also already included in the efficiency gains of management reform. The regional commissions stood very ready to move forward on that reform, operating under the guidance of the Deputy Secretary-General.

17. **Mr. Leenknegt** (Head of Unit, Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of Belgium) said that he was intrigued by Ms. Bárcena's statement that, while development coordination offices and different actors might not sit in the same place, there were ways to work together. It was not just about where the players were located at present but where some of the new players would be. It would be helpful to understand how and where the regional development coordination office hubs would operate, because adding new hubs to the existing 54 units, which were scattered across a long list of geographic locations and operating from different regional centres than the regional economic commissions or United Nations Sustainable Development Group teams, would squarely contradict the fifth key area of transformation listed in the report of the Secretary-General, namely common regional back offices and co-location where feasible. That report seemed to have been written mostly with regional commissions in mind, even if they represented

only a fraction of the United Nations human resources and budget at the regional level. More clarity on how the regional assets of United Nations development entities would be brought together would be welcome during the next steps of the review. The regional review did not cover the incredible lack of uniformity in the division of labour between regional commissions and the actual intergovernmental regional economic integration structures between Member States. Divergence existed among the regions with regard to what the United Nations was expected to do and what Member States were expected to do mostly on their own. It was valid to ask what the appropriate balance and division of labour would be and how efficient it was, as well as what the "ask" to the United Nations was compared to what everyone could do by themselves.

18. **Mr. Wandel** (Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Reforms), panellist, said that it had taken a while during the review to reach the conclusion that the regional assets of agencies, funds and programmes and the regional economic commissions were spread over 145 offices and also had different levels of concentration. Therefore, the idea that the regional United Nations presence could be concentrated in specific places was a complicated one – not an idea to be written off but one which would require very big structural discussions involving boards and Member States. The regional review and recommendation were part of a package. The Sustainable Development Goals and the regional sustainable development forums created the opportunity to listen better to regional policy agendas; such forums could work as integrators if they were recognized as such. Combined with the resident coordinator package, the United Nations Capital Development Fund was now formally open to address regional aspects of Member State demands on the United Nations system and organize assets to respond more effectively.

19. The demand dimension at the regional level was understood as twofold: some staff members were there not because they had been regionalized, but as a decentralization from their headquarters to serve a corporate function, such as country oversight or quality assurance. Nevertheless, they could also operate at the regional and subregional level. A knowledge hub had been proposed as a way for the system to publish its capacity and describe its staff more functionally, meaning not just in terms of numbers and levels. One avenue to take was to leverage the Sustainable Development Goal framework since it created common language that showed up in national planning, in voluntary national reviews and in how agencies had been aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals and

in the United Nations development cooperation framework.

20. The system would be more efficient if it were possible to disclose by region the functions of staff and which staff members could respond to Member State needs for multidimensional support, information that was not easily available at present. There might be someone with 15 or 20 years' experience inside the United Nations system who had the technical "know-how" and could find the right people to make the right response, but the system should be so transparent and effective that that was not necessary. The country team should simply be able to organize the multidimensional demand and responses.

21. Issue-based coalitions were another part of the package. If the capacity of the United Nations system at the regional level to respond to sustainable development demands was known, then it would be possible to introduce more functional leadership and make the system more responsive. The proposed package set some common approaches and standards, some of which could be published. That would deepen the reform around efficiencies and enhance regional specificity, which of course should be the end game of the process.

22. **Mr. Wahba** (Assistant Administrator and Director of the Regional Bureau for Arab States in the United Nations Development Programme), panellist, said that the reform process had not been a sudden change. It was not a wall falling, but rather the patient construction of an edifice led by the Deputy Secretary-General that interrogated the very need for a United Nations regional presence in the first place, what the benefits of such a presence were and what issues it was trying to resolve. Based on the responses to those questions, structures had been assembled that would lead to increased efficiency in the delivery of services and greater responsiveness to the needs of Member States. Such structures would also provide a necessary link between the global normative and policy work determined in forums such as the present one and at the regional level, especially in terms of cross-border and multi-country issues, and would serve the resident coordinators and the United Nations country teams at the country level.

23. The recommendations made had been based on an examination of the need for a regional presence as a value proposition, and how resident coordinators and country teams could benefit from structures such as the regional collaborative platforms. They could access knowledge, because there was a significant group of people at the regional level who had expertise in different areas and could bring that together in coherent policy advice to the country level, but there was also access at the regional level to an intergovernmental process that allowed for the setting of policy agendas at the regional level.

24. Rather than having expertise in each country office, whether substantive expertise or operational services, including human resources, procurement and financial services, an attempt was being made to collect that expertise at either the regional or the global level so that integrated, efficient cost-saving support could be provided at the country level. The building up by agencies, funds and programmes of expertise at the regional level, combined with high-level expertise in the regional commissions, allowed for economization in terms of the strength of headquarters locations compared with locations closer to country teams and to the resident coordinator. There was a need to integrate policy analysis and operational strength, and to translate that into programming at the regional and country levels. A strong presence at the regional level allowed for working within the mutually supportive nexus between humanitarian relief, development operations and political analysis. There were regional United Nations political, development and humanitarian structures and it was good for all of them to work together to provide coherent service levels to resident coordinators and their country teams.

25. **Mr. Leenknegt** (Head of Unit, Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of Belgium) said that the fact that headquarter functions existed at a decentralized level was often the result of a search for efficiencies. Donors needed to acknowledge that they had been the first to ask for such measures, which could not be reversed. Nevertheless, the highly inefficient scattering of regional hubs of the United Nations development system entities worldwide should not be glossed over. There was scope for reducing the 54 hubs to something more manageable and more coherent while leaving room for the decentralization of certain operational functions that were more efficiently carried out at certain duty stations than at others. In that sense, the dichotomy between operational and policy matters was not false after all.

26. **Mr. Shawesh** (Observer for the State of Palestine), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Group emphasized the importance of ensuring the timely implementation of all outstanding mandates from General Assembly resolutions 71/243 and 72/279. The repositioning of the United Nations development system must be conducted within the framework and spirit of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review, whose mandates and concepts should not be reopened or

renegotiated. The focus of the operational activities segment should be on implementation and on ensuring that, in their critical first year, all reform mandates were progressing at a pace satisfactory to programme countries. The General Assembly played a central role in discussing and deciding on matters pertaining to the quadrennial review and operational activities for development. It was the most universal intergovernmental mechanism for the formulation and appraisal of policy matters and was therefore the main platform for developing key system-wide strategic policy orientation and operational modalities for the United Nations development system. While the Council served as an accountability platform, any exercise to enhance that role should not undermine the Assembly as the main body responsible for strategic guidance and oversight of the development system.

27. He underscored the importance of national ownership and leadership in all matters pertaining to the ongoing implementation, which included the effective and timely reporting from resident coordinators and country teams back to host Governments. It was crucial that the new guidelines for the development of new United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks be developed in full consultation with host Governments, taking into account country needs and priorities. The Group would continue to support the efforts of the Secretary-General to deliver an effective and fit-for-purpose United Nations development system that would help programme countries implement the 2030 Agenda. Ultimately, the objective of all reform mandates must be to address the interests and needs of programme countries.

28. **Mr. Martin Prada** (Observer for the European Union) said that the regional dimension was a key element of the reform. As the last big piece of the reform parcel, it was fundamental to get it right. What the regional commissions were doing and what they could do was only one third of the picture. The other two thirds required more information and more detailed and informed discussions. For example, it was not known what the regional assets (6,000 people in the case of the agencies, funds and programmes) were doing in the 145 offices. It was clear that there was potential duplication and overlap in such a complex system and that a potential for savings and efficiency gains therefore existed. The Secretary-General's recommendations were a good start, but there was a need to move into a region-by-region discussion that was evidence-based. He was happy to hear that walls were starting to fall with regard to the regional dimension, but many more walls needed to fall in the future. He asked what the next steps were, how to move from general discussion and general

recommendations into a detailed discussion region by region and also hopefully to the taking of decisions in the not-too-distant future.

29. **Mr. Wandel** (Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Reforms) said that the current plan was to create some kind of a workplan, but analytical and change management teams needed to be set up region by region and then most likely start with the area of statistics. On the assumption that there would be support for the agenda, there was a need to work on how to integrate back office work that was being done very well at the country-office level. The issue of back office integration and common premises at the country level was a much more mature discussion, however, and consideration needed to be given to how to turn the two tracks into one track. Back office integration had a very clear regional dimension, which was clear in the review, and needed to begin. Teams and workplans would be set up. Once more knowledge had been gathered, it was assumed that such information would be published, leading to a further push for reform and greater efficiencies.

30. **Mr. Dewar Viscarra** (Mexico) said that ECLAC provided the intergovernmental structure for the instrumentalization of the 2030 Agenda, as well as a forum for discussion on how things were going in the region. He was pleased to see in the report of the Secretary-General that ECLAC was already doing what was hoped for at the regional level, such as working on migration issues. With regard to regional collaborative platforms, he wished to know what the interface between the policy and the operational parts was. There had been criticism of the number of reports produced by the regional commissions and other entities. He wondered how such reports were fostering operational action. The Secretary-General, in his report, discussed the work of regional collaborative platforms in policy and operational areas, but the challenge was how to unite those two spaces and what was being done to accomplish that. As Ms. Bárcena had pointed out, the country teams and the regional commissions had distinct functions. With regard to the way forward, he asked for further information on the dialogue with Member States.

31. **Mr. Soriano Mena** (El Salvador) said that he also wondered about next steps and what types of mandates were needed to implement the points presented by the Secretary-General in his report. If Member States endorsed what was being proposed, he asked whether the next step might be a report on the implementation of what was being suggested or a continuation of the consultation process. The evaluation should be carried out on a region-by-region basis, since many aspects remained unresolved. Some things were already being

done by the regional commissions, for example, the initiative of ECLAC involving Mexico and the countries of the Northern Triangle. He wished to know how the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC, which worked well, would function going forward. Lastly, with regard to the regional collaborative platforms, he wondered whether any reports for Member States were planned. It was not clear whether such reports would be transmitted through the Development Coordination Office to the Council or in another manner.

32. **Ms. Werdermann** (Observer for Switzerland) said that the 2030 Agenda reflected the complexity of the modern world and set out a vision for tackling global challenges. Stakeholders should reflect critically on their role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and identify powerful and sustainable solutions to those challenges. Doing so would help them focus on their mandates and more effectively promote universal norms and values in line with the Charter of the United Nations.

33. The Secretary-General had not called into question the legitimacy of the regional commissions or the regional bodies of United Nations agencies, or the operational mandates of United Nations entities and their governance structures. The United Nations regional architecture facilitated the development of tailored, systemic solutions to issues that could not be solved by one nation alone. By taking the issue-based approach recommended by the Secretary-General, greater focus would be placed on that important function.

34. **Mr. Amaral** (Brazil) said that more information on the proposed changes in the five key areas and on the lines of accountability was needed. Brazil could not accept cost increases or promises of future efficiency gains: the efficiency gains needed to be immediate. It was important for Member States to have a strong voice in the reform process. With regard to reducing overlaps, he was sceptical that new statistical capacities were needed and encouraged the United Nations regional assets to continue their close cooperation with the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics.

35. **Ms. de Amorim** (France) said that the success of the reform of the United Nations development system depended also on the efforts of the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. The reform of the United Nations regional architecture had not yet lived up to its promises, including with respect to efficiency gains. More information was needed on how overlaps were being addressed. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit on opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness in administrative support services by enhancing inter-agency cooperation, contained in document JIU/REP/2018/5, was a useful source of information in that regard.

36. The United Nations system had demonstrated its strength in addressing regional situations through its exemplary response to the Ebola epidemic. The Organization had an opportunity to demonstrate the efficiency gains resulting from the regional architecture reform through its response to the continuing Ebola epidemic in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and as it worked to improve access to development in the Sahel. Ensuring staff mobility at all levels, including among resident coordinators, was a crucial element of change management and the reform itself.

37. **Mr. Pfeil** (Germany) said that the Council had heard contradictory assessments of the regional architecture reform, including that it was in chaos, making it difficult for the discussion of the reform to move forward. Region-specific approaches were needed to reflect the different roles and functions of the various regional commissions. In addition to providing operational support, regional assets also had valuable normative, convening and peer-learning functions. Addressing the Executive Secretary of ECLAC, he asked that she identify specific overlaps within the regional dimension.

38. **Mr. Xu** Zhongsheng (China) said that the reform should enhance the role of regional commissions, which were important regional assets that channelled economic and social development assistance. Noting that development organizations carried out those projects for which they had resources, he suggested that regional commissions, some of which already hosted high-level policy-making regional events, could provide policy guidance to ensure coherence among such projects. Regional entities could also help to promote reforms that reflected the specific needs of their regions.

39. The proposed regional collaborative platform mechanism should improve on existing development coordination offices. The Group of 77 and China were of the view that the regional commissions should leverage their partnerships with the African Union, ASEAN and other regional partners to mobilize resources and come up with a better arrangement that did not involve the use of five D-2 posts at the regional level.

40. **Ms. Crabtree** (Turkey) said that it was important to ensure financial sustainability and efficiency gains and avoid creating new layers of bureaucracy. In that regard, a briefing on the proposed regional collaborative platforms and their budgetary implications would be

useful. As Member States worked to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, they enacted policies that were aligned with legally binding regional framework agreements. The support provided by the United Nations should avoid duplicating those efforts and should ensure that States could continue to meet their obligations under those agreements.

41. With regard to the analytical work and other actions to be undertaken at the regional level mentioned in the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review and in the system-wide strategic document, she cautioned that the consent of all the countries concerned in a region must be obtained. The United Nations should refrain from assisting with a regional issue if any of the affected Member States in the region did not wish to have such assistance. That view should be addressed in the system-wide strategic document and in the Council's discussions of the regional review.

42. **Ms. Nemroff** (United States of America) said that it was unclear what the purpose was of having resident coordinators be systematically invited to take an active role in regional conferences and platforms; what the aim was of the new protocol for country engagement by regional commissions and other Secretariat or non-resident agencies, which had been devised jointly with the Development Coordination Office; and why the Department of Economic and Social Affairs was increasing its participation in regional coordination mechanisms. During her posting as the representative of the United States to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, she had heard complaints about overlaps from officials at the Commission, the various development funds and programmes and from the representative of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Member States were responsible for overseeing the United Nations development system and needed clear data on duplication within the system and the associated costs in order to make informed decisions. It was not enough to know the number of staff members working in the different offices. She also urged the Secretariat to share any information already available relating to the mapping of publications and knowledge products in all regions.

43. **Ms. Leyva Regueira** (Observer for Cuba) said that it was regrettable that Member States had been given so little time to discuss the reform of the regional architecture for the first time and wished to know when they would next have an opportunity to do so. Cuba had had a positive experience working with ECLAC and believed that the role of the regional economic commissions needed to be preserved. The commissions

provided an intergovernmental space where Member States could agree on a common regional agenda and collaborate on common areas of interest, such as statistics. She was interested to know how communication between Member States and all entities of the United Nations development system would be further strengthened under the proposed new protocol for country engagement with respect to the commissions and non-resident agencies.

44. A protocol for country engagement by regional commissions and other Secretariat or non-resident agencies has been devised, jointly with the Development Coordination Office, to ensure that resident coordinators are informed of all in-country development activities.

45. **Ms. Grén** (Observer for Finland) said that it was crucial for the United Nations to reform its regional engagement by achieving greater synergy and integration of its functions and resources and pursuing greater efficiency and results. It should also focus more on the needs of the least developed countries and fragile States than on restructuring its regional assets. More information on the timetable of the regional reform, as well as on the expected savings, would be appreciated. It would also be helpful to know how much the regional representatives of the Development Coordination Office would be paid and what their relationship would be to the resident coordinator offices.

46. It was also unclear what new and systematic engagement at the regional level by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs would entail. The main goal of the reform of that Department should be to make it more efficient and effective, not to broaden its functions. The reform also needed to be fully transparent, in particular with regard to any impact on the secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests.

47. **Ms. Benjasil** (Observer for Thailand) said that the United Nations country office and the regional offices located in Thailand concentrated on projects within their areas of specialization that focused on specific Sustainable Development Goals. Given that the three mandates of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific were to provide an intergovernmental platform, conduct research and analysis and promote capacity-building, she wondered how the Commission would complement and add value to the work already being done by the regional and country offices and help to ensure that their work contributed to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. For example, the regional commissions could build national capacities in the field of data collection and statistical analysis in relation to Sustainable

Development Goals to help Member States base their decisions and policies on reliable information. The United Nations development system should strengthen its partnerships with other regional organizations, including ASEAN, to further accelerate progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

48. **Ms. Fladby** (Norway) said that in addition to mapping publications and knowledge products it would be useful to determine what kind of country-level expertise was available within the regional commissions and whether there were too many experts working on certain issues, while other similarly urgent issues were not being properly addressed.

49. The practical implications of the five proposals set out in the Secretary-General's report were difficult to understand. It was unclear how the regional collaborative platform would liaise with the issue-based coalitions; whether the proposed regional collaborative platform would be a mechanism for collaboration or whether it was a new structure; and whether the regional commissions would provide advice directly to the countries concerned or to the resident coordinators and the United Nations country teams. She was also unsure what the operational role of the regional commissions would be.

50. **Ms. Pindera** (Canada) said that in determining the best way to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals at the national level, the regional context and the associated transboundary issues needed to be taken into account. In addressing the issue of duplication and overlaps, the Secretariat should focus on the comparative advantages of the United Nations regional assets and on the potential efficiency gains. Member States should be kept informed and engaged throughout the reform process.

51. More information was needed with regard to how the changes to the governance structure would affect the way normative policy work would be carried out at the global, regional and national levels. The role of multi-country offices with respect to the resident coordinators and country teams was also unclear. In repositioning the United Nations development system, the focus needed to be on supporting Member States in their efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

52. **Ms. Saran** (Observer for South Africa) said that the Economic Commission for Africa played an important role in supporting efforts to implement Agenda 2063 of the African Union and the 2030 Agenda. She was interested to know how the reform would affect those efforts at the regional, subregional and country levels. More information would be

appreciated regarding training and retraining of the staff currently working in regional offices to prepare them to support the reform efforts. She encouraged the regional economic commissions to find ways to share good practices, while being mindful of the differences in their mandates and circumstances.

53. **Mr. Chumakov** (Russian Federation) said that the regional commissions were not to blame for chaos, if it even existed, in the field of regional development. The commissions were also not the cause of duplication that existed at the regional level, since their mandates were set by Member States and they were not best suited for addressing issues at the local level. The reform of the regional dimension should take into account the specific strengths of every regional commission. As had become clear in the first phase of the reform, one of the strengths of the Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) was its coordination mechanism. In particular, the Russian Federation was of the view that European integration efforts should receive support from an office based in Geneva, not Istanbul. In general, decisions and initiatives that affected the regional commissions should first be submitted for consideration by the governing bodies of those commissions.

54. **Mr. Moussa** (Egypt) said that a region-by-region approach should be followed in repositioning the regional architecture. The reform should preserve the vital role of the regional commissions and strengthen their mandates as platforms for intergovernmental consultations and for conducting research and analysis for countries in the region. Regional commissions should serve as secretariats for the regional collaborative platforms, pursuant to Council resolution 1998/46. It was important to ensure national ownership and leadership in the reform process. The Secretariat should therefore include Member States in all discussions of the regional dimension.

55. **Mr. Leenknegt** (Head of Unit, Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of Belgium) said that although the revamping of the resident coordinator system had already generated a lot of positive feedback in the field, many aspects of the reform remained unclear to Member States. The division of labour among the regional structures remained unclear, so no substantive changes could be made to address the gaps and overlaps between them.

56. With respect to the changes proposed in the five key areas of transformation identified in the report, it was unclear whether the United Nations regional collaboration platform would absorb the existing United

Nations coordination mechanisms through a merger or whether the existing coordination structure would be retained with the regional Development Coordination Office serving as a joint secretariat. Regardless, it was important to ensure that the functions of the existing United Nations coordination mechanisms would be performed regardless of the structure ultimately adopted.

57. It was also unclear how the Secretariat would produce annual reports on system-wide results at the regional level in support of the 2030 Agenda considering that implementation of the Agenda was generally assessed at the country level. In addition, although many speakers had emphasized the importance of taking a region-by-region approach to the reform, such an approach was only being taken in relation to consolidating capacities around data and statistics, while regional specificities were not being taken into account in the other areas.

58. The proposal to organize the work of regional collaborative platforms around a policy pillar and an operational pillar disregarded the fact that, in at least one region, another core activity related to standard setting and harmonization. It was also unclear whether the revamping of the regional architecture entailed rationalizing, strengthening or professionalizing it.

59. **Mr. Bin Momen** (Observer for Bangladesh) said that the proposals outlined in the report would be discussed with Member States; feedback from the ministries tasked with implementing the 2030 Agenda would be incorporated as well. The resident coordinators and country teams were involved in helping Member States with the day-to-day implementation of specific Sustainable Development Goals. Meanwhile, the regional commissions could assist Member States in tackling emerging issues and address the impact that rapid technological changes were having on lives and livelihoods.

60. **Ms. Bárcena** (Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and Coordinator for the Regional Economic Commissions) said that the proposed changes would not use any additional resources and would not create any additional structures, with the exception of the establishment of the Development Coordination Office and posts in the resident coordinator system that had already been agreed with Member States.

61. Under the proposed arrangement, the regional collaborative platforms would be co-located with the regional commissions, which would operate as secretariats. When the regional collaborative platforms were located elsewhere, teleconferencing and other modern technology would be used to enable close collaboration between the Development Coordination Office and the regional commission. Reporting on the work of the development system would be provided through the regional collaborative platform mechanism to the regional forums on sustainable development and to the Council. The mechanism would also be useful for helping Member States determine which issue-based coalitions needed to be established in support of the 2030 Agenda.

62. The commissions were responsible for working together and avoiding overlaps. UN-Women had co-located its regional office with ECLAC so that the two entities could work together on a regional conference on women and prepare joint publications. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) had also co-located its office with ECLAC. In view of the differences that existed between the regional commissions, each commission should propose a suitable regional architecture and leave the decision to Member States. With respect to joint publications, Regional Forums for Sustainable Development could submit a single report for a given region, to be produced jointly by all the development agencies.

63. Rather than be represented in the regions, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs should provide policy guidance to the regional commissions from New York. The regional commissions would function as its subsidiaries. The regional commissions should also take the opportunity to enhance their collaboration with the strengthened multi-country offices.

64. She would welcome suggestions from Member States on ways that the regional commissions could achieve greater efficiencies. In the case of ECLAC, she suggested that the office in Colombia could either be closed or moved to Panama.

65. **Mr. Wandel** (Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Reforms) said that the regional layer was complex and there were no ready answers to some of the questions that had been asked during the discussion. The Secretariat would work with Member States, the Council and the boards of the 24 major organizations that had regional offices to remove overlaps and achieve greater efficiencies. He proposed that a technical track be established as part of the regional review process to ensure transparency and collaboration with Member States. Policy, operational and managerial issues could be addressed and opportunities for efficiencies could be identified more easily at the regional level using the simpler mechanism of regional collaborative platforms,

with the independent development coordination office at the core of the secretariat.

66.   **Mr. Wahba** (Assistant Administrator and Director of the Regional Bureau for Arab States in the United Nations Development Programme) said that detailed information could be provided to Member States as soon as they required it. While the provision of policy advice and other functions should remain under the authority of the resident coordinator and the country team, certain payroll and other operational functions would be more efficiently and cost-effectively handled at a global level. For that reason, regional reform should be viewed as an element of a wider reform, not the reform in and of itself.

Agenda item 7: Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation (*continued*)

(a)   **Follow-up to policy recommendations of the General Assembly and the Council** (*continued*) (A/74/73-E/2019/14, A/74/73/Add.1-E/2019/14/Add.1, A/74/73/Add.2-E/2019/14/Add.2 and A/74/73/Add.3-E/2019/14/Add.3; E/2019/62)

(b)   **Reports of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme/ United Nations Population Fund/ United Nations Office for Project Services, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, and the World Food Programme** (E/2018/34/Rev.1, E/2018/35 and E/2019/36; UNW/2018/1, UNW/2018/5 and UNW/2018/7)

General discussion

67.   **Mr. Shawesh** (Observer for the State of Palestine), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the repositioning of the United Nations development system should be carried out as part of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review process. The mandates and concepts set out in General Assembly resolutions 71/243 and 72/279 were not subject to renegotiation as part of the repositioning process. Rather, Member States should use the operational activities segment to examine whether programme countries were satisfied with the pace of reforms during the critical first year.

68.   The General Assembly was the most universal mechanism for formulating policies and the main platform for developing strategic guidance and operational modalities for the development system.

Although the Council played a role in ensuring accountability, it should not undermine the General Assembly as the main body responsible for overseeing the United Nations development system.

69.   In view of the important role that national ownership and leadership played in the ongoing implementation process, resident coordinators and United Nations country teams should provide timely reports to host Governments and consult them on the new guidelines for the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

70.   The Group of 77 and China supported the efforts of the Secretary-General to reform the United Nations development system and deliver a fit-for-purpose system that addressed the needs of programme countries and helped them implement the 2030 Agenda.

71.   **Mr. Arriola Ramírez** (Paraguay), speaking on behalf of the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries, said that the repositioning of the United Nations development system should enable the revitalization of the Group's members, build their collective identity and better meet their national needs and priorities as they implemented the 2030 Agenda and the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024. The repositioning process should also put in place more effective linkages between follow-up and review processes, the programmes of action of the most vulnerable countries and other development instruments.

72.   The Group appreciated ongoing efforts to revitalize the resident coordinator system to enable it to better meet the specific needs of the most vulnerable countries. Resident coordinators and country teams should support the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals in landlocked developing countries by incorporating the priorities of the Vienna Programme of Action into their operational activities and into the new Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework at the national level. Greater coordination was also needed at the national level between the United Nations, the World Bank, other United Nations entities and the regional economic commissions.

73.   The Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States played an important role in the implementation of and follow-up to the Vienna Programme of Action in the countries concerned. The Office should be given more resources to support it in its work.

74. **Mr. Dzonzi** (Malawi), speaking on behalf of the Group of Least Developed Countries, said that it was vital for the legitimacy and effectiveness of the United Nations for development to be placed back at the centre of its work. The repositioned United Nations development system should provide better support to programme countries and facilitate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The resident coordinator system needed to be empowered and strengthened and adhere to the principles of efficiency, transparency and accountability. Resident coordinators should support their host Governments in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through nationally owned and led endeavours and monitor their progress. The resident coordinator system also needed predictable funding. Resident coordinators and United Nations country teams should help to mobilize resources from donor countries and other stakeholders. The Group welcomed the establishment of a dedicated multi-country office in the North Pacific. Given that resident coordinators in such offices had to juggle multiple United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks, appropriate staffing and predictable funding were essential for ensuring that the offices were able to adequately and proportionally address the needs of their constituents.

75. The new guidelines for the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework should properly reflect development-related outcomes and individual programmes of action, in particular the 2011 Istanbul Declaration and the attendant Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011–2020, to ensure the coherent implementation of all relevant agendas. Furthermore, cooperation frameworks should be developed in collaboration with national Governments and reflect national priorities. Lastly, all United Nations entities, the World Bank Group, the International Monetary Fund and other international and regional organizations should support the implementation of the Development Cooperation Framework. Resident coordinators should report to the host Governments on the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework, in line with General Assembly resolution 72/279.

76. **Mr. Elisaia** (Observer for Samoa), speaking on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum, said that the United Nations needed to do more to support small island developing States, in particular those covered by multi-country offices, in implementing the Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway outcome document and the 2030 Agenda. The United Nations development system needed to take into account the unique development dynamics of each country in the region and the unique challenges it faced, in addition to the challenges it had in common with its neighbours. Development efforts needed to focus on country-specific solutions that were in line with national priorities and were developed in consultation with Member States. United Nations country teams must also align their work with the priorities set by the programme country. In that connection, more resources were needed to support activities organized by multi-country offices outside of their hubs. Dedicated funding rounds under the Joint Fund for the 2030 Agenda that would benefit small island developing States were also needed.

77. The geographic distances separating the islands in the Pacific region made travel difficult and costly, posing a unique operating challenge. The United Nations needed to change its modus operandi and limit the number of countries covered by a single multi-country office and resident coordinator. It also needed to do more to help small island developing States in the North Pacific, which faced development challenges that were exacerbated by the adverse effects of climate change. In that regard, the Forum welcomed the recommendation that a multi-country office be established in the North Pacific and stressed the importance of providing that office with tailored resources and a clear road map to guide its implementation of the regional approach. The reassessment of the Joint Presence Offices and how they could be strengthened to complement the multi-country offices would further improve the coordination work of the United Nations on the ground.

78. The representatives of Pacific island States had been advocating for the establishment of a multi-country office in the North Pacific for well over a decade with the aim of enhancing United Nations presence in the region. Samoa therefore welcomed the recommendation that such an office be established.

79. **Mr. Niang** (Observer for Senegal), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that Member States should play a leadership role in the process of repositioning the United Nations development system, and that accountability to national Governments and continuous dialogue should be part of the process in line with General Assembly resolution 72/279.

80. The funding compact would help to ensure that the United Nations development system had more flexible and predictable funding, enabling it to tackle the global, interconnected challenges embodied in the Sustainable Development Goals. The imbalance between core and non-core resources also needed to be addressed. It was worrying that the implementation of the new resident

coordinator system was facing a funding gap. He called on all Member States to contribute to the resident coordinator system as soon as possible to ensure that it was fully funded by the end of 2019. The coordination levy should be introduced as soon as possible and should not be part of cost recovery of individual United Nations entities.

81. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework was a core instrument for planning and implementing United Nations development activities. In view of the specific needs of African countries, United Nations country teams should continue to have a strong presence there and their configuration should be determined with the agreement of the national Governments. The configuration, capacity and role of multi-country offices also needed to be improved, in consultation with the countries concerned, with the aim of accelerating implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Special attention was needed to ensure that multi-country offices in Africa were able to offer tailored and effective development services. In view of the recommendation to reinforce the regional architecture of the United Nations development system, the Group would welcome more comprehensive information about existing and needed regional resources and how they would be redistributed.

82. Global efforts to reposition the United Nations development system should focus on helping countries overcome the specific challenges they faced in achieving sustainable development and eradicating poverty. Intensive coordination and cooperation among Member States and the United Nations development system was needed to build on the momentum generated by the adoption of General Assembly resolution 72/279 and to implement the 2030 Agenda.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.