



# Economic and Social Council

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## 2023 session

25 July 2022–26 July 2023 Coordination segment

### Summary record of the 10th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 2 February 2023, at 3 p.m.

*President:* Mr. Nasir (Vice-President) . . . . . (Indonesia)

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*In the absence of Ms. Stoeva (Bulgaria), Mr. Nasir (Indonesia), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

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

#### **Agenda Item 8: Coordination segment (continued)**

*Panel discussion: “The way forward: Transformative policies and actions”*

1. **Mr. Steiner** (Under-Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)), panellist, said that a number of States were feeling the economic and financial effects of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the war in Ukraine and other crises. Although many countries remained on track to meet several of the targets and indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals, the world as a whole would struggle to reach them by 2030. However, those Goals had been agreed upon in 2015, prior to the pandemic and its resulting effects. At the Sustainable Development Goals Summit in 2023 and the Summit of the Future in 2024, the international community must take stock of the progress made and rethink the target outcomes of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2. Finance must be a key transformative area, and the lessons learned during the pandemic should be considered. The United Nations development system had come together to assist countries in conducting a rapid socioeconomic assessment of the impacts of COVID-19 in order to target the response to those most vulnerable and most likely to suffer from loss of income during lockdowns. As a result, Governments were able to quickly identify priority areas for investment. In collaboration with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and United Nations country teams, UNDP assisted States in establishing integrated national financing frameworks, which facilitated a better understanding of available resources so that Governments could make more informed choices and have a more effective emergency response. Such assistance was essential, particularly for countries at risk of debt distress, since ministries of finance were not capable of undertaking nuanced assessments and proposing a response.

3. At the meeting of the Group of 20 in Indonesia in 2022, the Secretary-General had called for an annual stimulus to support the Goals as a way to leverage and restructure debt towards investments to support education, sustainable development, the Paris Agreement adopted under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and other areas. Such a plan would inject liquidity into the global

economy, tackle the debt issue and allow Governments the fiscal space needed to intervene.

4. **Ms. Russell** (Executive Director of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)), panellist, said that decades of progress in children’s well-being had begun to unravel as a result of conflict, climate change and the socioeconomic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2020, an additional 100 million children had fallen into poverty and an additional 10 million girls were at risk of child marriage. Global immunization coverage for children had dropped precipitously, and two thirds of children aged 10 years were unable to read or understand simple texts.

5. Children must be at the heart of global action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and their rights must be at the centre of pandemic recovery planning. The systems that they relied on must be resilient and well financed. Given the commitment to leave no one behind, the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children must be reached. The collection and use of high-quality disaggregated data would help identify those most in need and how best to assist them. Furthermore, children and young people were agents of change. As such, the international community must elevate their voices and facilitate their participation in crafting the solutions that would impact their futures.

6. UNICEF and its partners supported several key initiatives related to the Goals. During the United Nations Water Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028 (United Nations 2023 Water Conference), UNICEF would collaborate with partners to discuss its “Water security for all” initiative and sanitation game plan. The “No time to waste” initiative supported early prevention, detection and treatment of severe wasting in children under 5 years of age in the 15 countries most affected by the ongoing nutrition crisis. To help close the digital divide, initiatives had been launched to provide children with quality public digital learning platforms. In addition, UNICEF and the International Telecommunication Union had partnered on the “Giga” initiative to connect every school in the world to the Internet. Support was also provided to Governments seeking to engage with international financial institutions in order to facilitate access to development financing in support of vulnerable children. Political will, bold action, innovative thinking and, above all, cooperation would be necessary to get back on track in achieving the Goals.

7. **Ms. Brands Kehris** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and Head of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in New York), panellist, said that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) worked to connect the 2030 Agenda and human rights through a “human rights enhancing economy”. Economic reform was urgently needed; however, it should address and not exacerbate inequalities. People and human rights must be intentionally placed at the centre of policymaking, and States’ human rights obligations must align with their priorities on public finance, taxation, budgeting, trade and debt. At the international level, the financial system should be reformed to expand fiscal space for human rights and sustainable development.

8. OHCHR assisted States through various programmes. It was contributing to human rights-based taxation discussions in Jordan; working with Government officials to strengthen their capacity on human rights-based approaches to budgeting and social sector allocations in Kenya; supporting discussions on the impact of development projects funded by foreign debt on economic, social and cultural rights in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic; and improving access to safe water in substandard settlements in Serbia.

9. Transformative environmental action to reverse the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss must be guided by and advance human rights, including the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Meaningful, inclusive and safe participation in policymaking was essential to create change. Furthermore, a human rights-based approach to the voluntary national reviews would result in a more granular analysis, which would help to identify blind spots, generate better data and address the structural causes of inequalities. The guidance note *Human Rights and Voluntary National Reviews*, published in 2022, spotlighted promising practices in that regard.

10. **Mr. Miranda** (Co-Chair of the Independent Group of Scientists for the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023), panellist, speaking via video link, said that the resilience and well-being of the planet, environment, ecosystems and populations relied on several sources of security: social, geopolitical, energy, climate, water and food. In addition, financial, human, knowledge and institutional resources must be used judiciously and effectively to regain momentum and accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. The *Global Sustainable Development Report 2023* provided a framework for understanding the practical tools and strategic actions needed to accelerate progress in achieving the Goals. It also provided a stylized model to explain the transformation process,

supported by a number of past and present examples, with a view to incentivizing and supporting strategic decision-making by various societal actors. The nature and process of the transformations needed to achieve sustainability would vary depending on the context. A critical appraisal and an evidence-based decision-making process were therefore essential to determine the approach most likely to succeed. The report also outlined the way in which knowledge must evolve to best serve transformation processes, particularly by generating knowledge from a broader spectrum of society and connecting that knowledge to decision-making in a more robust manner. The framework and examples provided in the report were intended to facilitate an accelerated approach to achieving the Goals and encourage stakeholders to be strategic and effective in their engagement with the necessary transformations.

11. **Mr. Steiner** (Under-Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that the creation of the Sustainable Development Goals had recognized the interdependent nature of the global community, which extended beyond globalization, trade and a balance of payments to human security, as the COVID-19 pandemic had demonstrated. At the same time, access to vaccines and the means to afford them was uneven and allowed people and States to act independently at the cost of the fundamental principle of common solidarity. In the light of that recent example, the international community must take care not to fall victim to short-term narratives and turn to isolation and independence, whether at the individual, country or continental level. The assessment of the 2030 Agenda at its midway point should go beyond a financial lens and take into account the lessons learned from the pandemic, which were far-reaching, disruptive and transformative. The Goals were not merely a set of targets and indicators; they were a declaration of interdependence and should characterize the types of responses needed to address the current global crises. One such example was the Pandemic Fund of the World Bank, which had been established to provide dedicated financing to facilitate a collective response to the next pandemic.

12. **Ms. Russell** (Executive Director of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)) said that, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many people had felt that children had not been as affected as adults because they had been less vulnerable to the virus. However, the impact on children, particularly those most vulnerable, had been very dramatic. The international community already had the strategies needed to immunize children, promote education and build community health systems. The question was whether it had the will to do so. If

children were not a priority in all work, it would not be possible to build a strong future for the rest of the world.

13. **Ms. Sandström** (Observer for Finland) said that water should be seen as a global common good, and collective action was required to address the water crisis. An improved and efficient global governance structure on water was also needed. In that connection, the international community must strengthen dialogue within the United Nations and ensure effective coordination and coherence in its work. In order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the full water cycle must be taken into account. She asked how a system-wide approach to water could be implemented to enable the United Nations to work more efficiently to achieve water security for all.

14. **Mr. Steiner** (Under-Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that, during the seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly, Member States had linked fundamental human rights to the environment. Sustainable Development Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation was related to life on land, life below water, food and agriculture, climate change, pollution and ecosystem and watershed management. As a result, it was important to consider water in terms of its hydrological cycle rather than its use by sector in order to find solutions for an increasingly water-stressed world. Water scarcity would soon threaten wealthy countries as well. He hoped that the United Nations 2023 Water Conference could provide some solutions.

15. **Ms. Russell** (Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that it was important to mainstream water into all the work done within the United Nations system and to recognize the linkages with the work carried out in other agencies. Water policies must be gender responsive; protect the dignity and safety of women and children with regard to water, sanitation and menstrual health; and ensure that women and girls were protected from violence when collecting water. Since many aspects of the work of UNICEF were tied to the issue of water, the United Nations 2023 Water Conference would provide an opportunity to ensure that those issues were considered in programming decisions.

16. **Ms. Brands Kehris** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and Head of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in New York) said that, although the COVID-19 pandemic had revealed the interrelatedness of communities and States, it had not led to solidarity in the global response. The right to water was essential and related clearly to the right to a life of dignity. Broad participation must be encouraged

to find solutions, with input from the scientific community as well as civil society. Human rights were not simply obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; they could also provide solutions. The approach to water must therefore have people and human rights at its centre.

17. **Mr. Miranda** (Co-Chair of the Independent Group of Scientists for the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023) said that the Sustainable Development Goals were more complex and challenging than the Millennium Development Goals. They required stakeholders to embrace interlinkages and create opportunities for synergies in a way that was simple and realistic and considered each individual context. The international community should assist States in developing the capacity needed to embrace the complexity of the Goals and work across multiple fields to create strategic and effective solutions.

18. **Mr. Abdelaal** (Observer for Egypt) said that the greatest challenge facing developing countries was having the financing necessary to implement the 2030 Agenda. At the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2022, Member States had agreed to establish a loss and damage fund and had called for discussions on international financial institutions and their role in climate finance. He asked how the forthcoming Sustainable Development Goals Summit could explore innovative strategies to bridge the financing gap.

19. **Mr. Vinito** (India) said that the specific problems impeding the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals should be examined at a more granular level. For example, solutions required a better understanding of debt and financing concerns, which were discussed in a number of forums. Partnerships were needed to diversify and localize capabilities in order to bridge the divide between developed and developing countries. The discriminatory practices that had characterized the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic for many States should not be repeated. Digital tools must work for the greater public good to amplify analog systems and support development. The role of women as community leaders was also a key factor in achieving the Goals. In India, they had played an essential role in reaching water and sanitation targets. He asked what Member States could do in the lead-up to the Sustainable Development Goals Summit to encourage follow through on the concept of the stimulus proposed by the Secretary-General to support the Goals.

20. **Ms. Ratnamurti** (Indonesia) said that science, data and technology were crucial to developing risk-

informed policies and targeting root causes in order to overcome challenges effectively and build resilience to future crises. In that connection, Indonesia was participating as a pilot country in the Sustainable Development Goals Push Diagnostic initiative developed by UNDP and had used the tool to determine the status of each of the Goals. Concrete, transformative policies had been proposed during the current coordination segment. The Council must now ensure that they were coherent, applicable on the ground and implemented through coordinated action.

21. **Mr. Meschchanov** (Observer for Russian Federation) said that, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the family was the fundamental group of society and should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that its members, particularly children, could fully assume their responsibilities within the community. He asked how the United Nations system could work towards that goal and support the family's role in promoting the ideals enshrined in the 2030 Agenda, including solidarity, the fight against inequality, collective solutions and social sustainability.

22. **Mr. Zhang** Wenjian (World Meteorological Organization) said that, since the 1980s, data-sharing on water had steadily declined among States and within the international community. A collaborative spirit must therefore be promoted at the United Nations 2023 Water Conference. Some States that were willing to share data lacked the basic capacity to take measurements. He asked how the United Nations system could provide financing solutions so that developing countries had the resources necessary to meet the Sustainable Development Goals on water and other issues.

23. **Ms. Hordosch** (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)) said that a global analysis of progress on gender equality and women's rights conducted by UN-Women showed that women and girls bore the brunt of the socioeconomic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, as well as violent conflicts and climate-related disasters. Moving forward, progress on gender equality would remain out of reach unless long-term structural barriers, including discriminatory norms, laws and practices, were addressed and dismantled. According to a recent report by UNDP and UN-Women on government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, the key enablers of an effective response were linked to women in government leadership positions and the presence of strong women's rights organizations. The report's recommendations focused on the need to invest in future preparedness; harness technology; and strengthen social protection, public

services and democratic processes to ensure that those in vulnerable situations, particularly women, could shape budgets, policies and laws.

24. Responses to the pandemic and other crises must incorporate health-care issues and prioritize sexual and reproductive health. There was also an urgent need for measures to support girls returning to school, particularly girls from marginalized communities. Governments must do more to support women in the workforce, guarantee decent work for all, remove legal barriers for women and support access to affordable and quality childcare. In addition, investments were urgently needed in inclusive, universal and gender-responsive social protection systems that supported all women and girls. Governments must guarantee an equal share of power for women and their involvement in all decision-making bodies. Women should be at the centre of all aspects of response and recovery and all development and peace processes.

25. **Mr. Gatev** (Bulgaria) asked what the priorities of the Council should be as it prepared for the high-level political forum on sustainable development in the lead-up to the Sustainable Development Goals Summit.

26. **Mr. Steiner** (Under-Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that, through the integrated national financing frameworks, UNDP provided Governments with analytical tools to determine their financial priorities. One government strategy to increase revenue was to raise taxes. Taxation was undervalued as a tool to provide the capital needed to invest in recovery and expand social services. In the next two years, the minimum global corporate tax rate of 15 per cent would come into effect, providing up to an additional \$100 billion in annual net revenue for the countries in which UNDP operated. Taxation could also help to address inequality in countries with extreme wealth divides. The second strategy was to leverage private capital in delivering public goods and creating incentives for investment through good governance, de-risking and regulatory reform. For example, India was undertaking a project to expand its renewable energy infrastructure to a capacity of 48,000 megawatts by 2030, which would be financed almost entirely by the private sector. Good governance, clear regulatory frameworks and an established system for collecting payments gave investors the peace of mind needed to support the project.

27. In that connection, official development assistance (ODA) could be used to reduce the perceived or real risks for private investors looking to expand, particularly in the least developed countries and on the

African continent. At the same time, the international community must acknowledge that 0.3 per cent of gross national income for ODA was insufficient. Countries could not be asked to transform their economies to achieve net-zero emissions without co-investments when millions of people still had no access to electricity. The financing discussion must also address the lack of confidence in investing in developing countries among the States members of the Group of Seven and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

28. In order to solve the debt problem, the international community must go beyond extending or pausing interest payments and urgently embrace a forward-looking debt restructuring strategy in which economic stimulus was linked explicitly to the Sustainable Development Goals, with a view to investing in economies that would build forward better from the crisis. The Sustainable Development Goals Push Diagnostic tool aimed to assist States in designing smart interventions in resource-constrained conditions in order to resume progress on the Goals. To achieve the greatest impact, investments should focus on governance, social protection, the green economy and digitalization. While Governments must take the lead to legitimize decisions, the international community must provide support for those plans to succeed.

29. **Ms. Russell** (Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that financing went far beyond ODA. UNICEF sought to support innovative solutions that could have multiple benefits. For example, thoughtful investments in community health could support many of the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, she encouraged States to comply with their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was critical to protecting the rights of children.

30. **Ms. Brands Kehris** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and Head of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in New York) said that financing should be discussed at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit and the Summit of the Future. It should also be included in discussions about "Our Common Agenda". The human rights enhancing economy required financing at all levels. Under that innovative approach, human rights activists and economists worked together rather than in silos, and she encouraged Member States to join the conversation as well. Human rights and gender perspectives should be taken into consideration when examining gaps and challenges and identifying solutions. A human rights-based approach must also be taken to collecting

disaggregated data to identify those who were furthest behind, for which her Office could provide guidance.

31. Treaty bodies and special procedures, particularly the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, could contribute their expertise to the issues addressed by the Council. Their involvement provided an opportunity to incorporate the wealth of knowledge accumulated in the human rights mechanisms based in Geneva into the work undertaken in New York.

32. **Mr. Miranda** (Co-Chair of the Independent Group of Scientists for the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023) said that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda required collective action to take advantage of synergies and opportunities to work across sectors and involve a multiplicity of actors, including youth, civil society and established institutions. Some solutions would be led by States, and others would require an international or intergovernmental approach. However, locally led initiatives must also be part of the solution. In looking forward to the high-level political forum, the international community must apply that mindset to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in order to amplify the impact of its work and reduce collateral damage. He invited stakeholders to think beyond their area of expertise or the reach of their institutions and to engage and connect with others to create transformative solutions.

33. **Mr. Li Junhua** (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) said that the United Nations system must leverage upcoming opportunities to harness synergies, mobilize actors and advance the 2030 Agenda. The United Nations 2023 Water Conference, the midterm review of the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the high-level political forum would set the expectations for the Sustainable Development Goals Summit. In addition, the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development, to be held during the seventy-eighth session of the General Assembly, must be a catalyst for closing financing gaps and creating the fiscal space needed to achieve the Goals. Through integrated national financing frameworks, the United Nations continued to support States in aligning financing policies with sustainable development strategies.

34. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs had compiled a database of efforts to support the achievement of the Goals at the national, regional and international levels. It drew on responses to the annual survey on high-impact initiatives and multi-stakeholder partnerships undertaken by United Nations system entities in relation to the annual theme. The Department

would continue to bring together the bodies of the Council to provide coherent and coordinated support to Member States in recovering from the pandemic and accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

35. **The President** said that, while the international community faced significant challenges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, there was cause for optimism. Creative ideas, concrete efforts, transformative actions and international solidarity would provide the road map for success. The current unprecedented, intertwined global challenges required solutions that moved away from siloed work towards a more comprehensive and integrated approach. More needed to be done in order for global development policies to provide an enabling and conducive environment for countries to progress.

36. The Council and other United Nations system entities should take advantage of the opportunity to evaluate their efforts during the events leading up to the Sustainable Development Goals Summit and the high-level political forum. The various agreements, action plans and goals must be translated into concrete, context-specific programmes and projects. Since financing played a critical role in achieving the Goals, discussions on financing, including proposals related to the international financial architecture, should continue at the forthcoming Economic and Social Council forum on financing for development follow-up and the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development.

37. The published summary of the coordination segment would include an annex with a list of good practices and transformative policies, programmes and projects to be used as a reference to advance the 2030 Agenda at the national and regional levels and guide discussions at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit and other major events in 2023.

*The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.*