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PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 3rd MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 3 February 1999, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. FULCI (Italy)

later: Mr. VALDIVIESO (Colombia)
(Vice-President)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

The PRESIDENT presented a seven-point programme for 1999 to enable the Economic and Social Council to resume its role as principal organ of the United Nations system responsible for international economic and social affairs. First, the Council must again have its own permanent meeting place. With the Secretary-General's support and understanding, it should be possible to overcome the bureaucratic inertia that had for 20 years prevented the Council from meeting in its own Chamber, which lacked enough seats to accommodate some 80 observers.

Second, poverty reduction and its ultimate eradication would be the central theme of the deliberations. The high-level segment would focus on the role of employment in poverty eradication and the advancement of women. The operational activities segment would also be geared to poverty eradication and capacity-building. The Council would endeavour to achieve concrete results rather than merely producing words and documents. The final documents should not exceed two pages; otherwise, no one would read them. The goal should be to elaborate a Council manifesto against poverty, the prime enemy of humankind. To prepare such an agenda, centred on immediate action, five panel discussions would be held prior to July, three of them in New York, one in Turin (at the invitation of the mayor of that city) and one in Geneva. Participants were encouraged to indicate their priorities and make practical suggestions that would serve as a basis for the final document.

Third, any poverty elimination strategy should focus in particular on the development of Africa. Every effort should be made to assist the African countries to exploit their enormous development potential. Using the Secretary-General's report and his relevant recommendations as a basis, close coordination should be established and concrete measures applied. The Council should show that it is capable of assuming its responsibilities under the Charter.

Fourth, to make the Council's approach more action- and outcome-oriented, its working relations with the Bretton Woods institutions must be strengthened,

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and solid cooperation with the international financial agencies established. With a view to following up the previous year's initiatives, three high-level meetings with the international financial institutions had been planned.

Fifth, as suggested in the Secretary-General's report on the work of the Organization (A/53/1, para. 30), it might be appropriate to apply Article 65 of the Charter. In that context, contacts had been made with the Presidents of the Security Council for the months of January and February 1999 to study how to organize the Economic and Social Council's assistance to the Security Council, as provided for in Article 65. That represented an important step, since peace and security were closely related to humanitarian assistance, sustainable development and human rights.

Sixth, coordination of the commissions and subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council had to be strengthened. To meet that objective, the Council must continue to play an active role as coordinator, within the United Nations system, of economic and social affairs and related matters, with a special focus on the rationalization and revitalization of the activities of its commissions and subsidiary bodies. All Member States should urge their delegations to play an active role in the work of the commissions to which they belonged.

Seventh, the Council must reform its working methods. Its revitalization would be impossible if it did not make use of the opportunities provided by the new information technologies. The Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva had therefore been requested to study the possibility of fully publicizing the high-level segment on the Internet, and the Council had requested the advisory assistance and support of the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics.

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

The SECRETARY-GENERAL said that the Council was beginning its work in 1999 as it kept pace with globalization, which drew peoples together, expanded markets and opened the world, but also compounded risks and uncertainties. The United Nations system and the Economic and Social Council should make a contribution to the international effort to minimize those risks and uncertainties, one of the great challenges of the contemporary world. The Council and the Administrative Committee on coordination (ACC) were both undergoing a transformation that would help prepare the system for that task.

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The dialogue which had been initiated in 1998 between the Council and the Secretary-General, in his capacity as the Chairman of ACC, had therefore acquired even greater significance in 1999.

Over the past year, the Economic and Social Council had increasingly begun truly to function as a Council, as had been evident in the number of major initiatives that it had successfully undertaken. They included the high-level dialogue with the Bretton Woods institutions held in April and ably chaired by the President of the Council; the special session to promote a coordinated and integrated United Nations response to global conferences, taking in all parts of the system and civil society; the review and streamlining of a number of subsidiary bodies; the series of joint Bureau meetings to ensure greater complementarity and harmony in what had come to be called the "Economic and Social Council system"; and the greatly enhanced effectiveness and efficiency of Council meetings through improved working methods, leading for the first time in 1998 to the adoption of a Ministerial Communiqué on the theme of "market access".

The rejuvenation of the Council had been paralleled by a new spirit of motivation and a growing culture of consultation and cooperation in ACC. Those trends reflected the shared realization that to make progress towards the goals of peace and development, the intergovernmental and inter-agency components of the system must move in tandem. Coordination implied more than decisions and directives; it implied continuous dialogue and real engagement among all partners. As Chairman of ACC, he reaffirmed his commitment to working with the Council and its President to promote the success of that process.

ACC had moved in a determined fashion to realize its potential. A main focus of ACC discussions the previous autumn had been a review of the implications of the global financial crisis and the response of the United Nations system. With the full involvement of the heads of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, ACC members had committed themselves to joint action. Among other things, they had issued an urgent call for immediate help to those countries suffering acute hardship. They had also pledged to work together to help countries carry out the necessary structural and institutional reforms and build basic social services and safety nets.

The work of ACC during 1998 demonstrated how the system could come together and interact constructively with the Council on global issues and priorities

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which cut across functional and institutional responsibilities.

The issues addressed in 1998 included poverty eradication, human rights, gender equality, population, international drug abuse control, natural disaster reduction and peace-building.

ACC had sought to mobilize a system-wide response by adopting joint statements, activating its inter-agency machinery and promoting collaboration at the country level through the resident coordinator system. It had also focused on ways to develop the system's response to his report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa (A/52/871). The outcome of its deliberations should assist the Council's own consideration of the topic at its coordination segment on development in Africa and help advance the holistic approach advocated in his report.

In 1998, ACC had continued its wide-ranging exchanges on the reform processes under way in the United Nations system. Clearly, the reform of ACC itself was an integral part of the overall reform of the system. ACC members had committed themselves to making the Committee a centrepiece of a more united and effective system. To that end, a number of steps and decisions had been taken in 1998. First, as a follow-up to the reform programme, he had established the Office of Inter-Agency Affairs. Its main functions were to provide support to ACC and its subsidiary bodies, to promote the exchange of information among the organizations of the system and to help reinforce links between ACC and the Economic and Social Council, and with the governing bodies of the system. Second, as all parts of the system were increasingly focusing on strategic planning, there was agreement among ACC heads that such planning should also become a focus of ACC as a whole in order to help the system look forward in a united and coherent manner. That process would be facilitated by consultative mechanisms involving groups of executive heads and an information system linking all executive heads. Third, the system's links with civil society were growing stronger.

As the Council began another year of work, the intergovernmental and inter-agency wheels of the system were running increasingly in tandem. He was pleased that the President had launched an initiative for a series of panel discussions around the goal of poverty eradication and had made initial contacts with the President of the Security Council on how to build links between the two organs, as envisaged in Article 65 of the Charter.

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Globalization was a fact of life, and the challenge was to create a globalized world with a human face. Progress must continue in making the Council an ever more effective body for meeting the goals enshrined in the Charter of promoting social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom. He offered his full support and cooperation in that endeavour.

Ms. PERSAUD (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Secretary-General had helped to lift the veil of mystery that had surrounded the work of ACC and, in so doing, had contributed in no small way to fostering a new spirit of partnership between the various organizations of the United Nations system and the Council, whose responsibility it was to promote greater coordination and harmonization of efforts throughout the system.

The Group of 77 and China therefore welcomed the increased cooperation between the Council and ACC, for it considered that closer interaction between the Secretariat and intergovernmental machineries was essential to the identification and pursuit of common objectives and to the strengthening of multilateral action.

As the principal point of interface between the United Nations and the wider United Nations system, the Council had an important role to play, in tandem with the General Assembly, in fostering joint action on the Organization's critical development priorities. In that context, the Group wished to underscore the importance of poverty eradication and closing the gap between rich and poor, which was the key challenge of modern times and a central objective of the United Nations system. The importance of coordinated, system-wide action to address that issue could not be overemphasized. It was to be hoped that ACC would continue to examine ways to support countries in dealing with the plight of the poor in the context of globalization. At the same time, the Group of 77 looked forward to the 1999 high-level segment as an opportunity to impart fresh impetus to United Nations action in the fight against poverty.

The Group of 77 counted on the Secretary-General's leadership and the support of ACC in dealing with those issues of concern to the developing world and the larger community of nations.

Mr. HENZE (Germany), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia and, in addition, Iceland and Liechtenstein, said that ACC and the Council should interact closely

and in a coordinated manner in order to make the process within the United Nations system and its specialized agencies mutually supportive and to create cross-fertilization of information, ideas and experience.

The Council should be kept informed of the outcomes of ACC meetings, so that it could fulfil its coordination role in the United Nations system in the economic, social and related fields and in revitalizing its relations with the specialized agencies, as had been agreed in the Agenda for Development. The European Union welcomed the intention of ACC to submit to the Council action-oriented recommendations to improve system-wide coordination on issues for consideration by the Council.

The Secretary-General's programme for reform needed to expand reform initiatives on a system-wide level, and ACC would have a key role to play; however, in order to achieve better coordination, the mere exchange of information was insufficient. Further coordination was needed, including a distribution of different roles in working towards a shared objective.

Aware of the special, multifaceted problems confronting Africa, the European Union welcomed the continued priority being placed on African economic recovery and sustainable development. Africa's problems could be solved only by a holistic, coordinated approach, engaging the United Nations system, regional and subregional organizations and national Governments and the civil societies of the States concerned. The European Union welcomed the Secretary-General's emphasis on the importance of human rights, democracy, the rule of law and good governance in achieving durable peace and sustainable development throughout Africa. The European Union shared the Secretary-General's view that any strategy for achieving sustainable growth in Africa must include, among other things, commitment and action by African States themselves to create an environment conducive to investment and growth. The European Union welcomed the theme of the 1999 coordination segment, which would deal with Africa in particular, and it encouraged ACC in its next meeting to focus on that matter and give input to the Council.

The European Union very much welcomed the efforts of the whole United Nations system to fully integrate human rights into its policies and programmes, and it encouraged ACC to take into account the outcome of the 1998 coordination segment, which had been devoted to the coordinated follow-up to and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. In its agreed

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conclusions, the Council had reaffirmed the United Nations' system-wide approach to human rights and called upon all components of the system to continue their efforts to increase coordination and inter-agency cooperation to promote all human rights, especially women's human rights, in their activities. ACC could make an important contribution in that context, in close cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The European Union noted with deep concern that the security situation of United Nations staff had continued to deteriorate, and it fully supported all efforts to improve the security of civil, military and locally recruited staff. It had therefore sponsored General Assembly resolution 53/87 of 7 December 1998 on the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and protection of United Nations personnel, and it welcomed all measures taken by the United Nations to promote the security of its staff, including training and information exchange. The security of humanitarian personnel should be a major issue for the United Nations, and a full investigation of each incident involving such personnel was therefore very important.

Also of great importance was the theme of the high-level segment, "The role of employment and work in poverty eradication: the empowerment and advancement of women". Moreover, the ACC Statement of Commitment for Action to Eradicate Poverty was an important input for the Council. The European Union reaffirmed, as noted in that Statement, that "poverty eradication - a main underlying theme of recent global conferences - is a key international commitment, and a central objective of the United Nations system" (E/1998/73, para. 1).

It would be useful to know whether ACC had been able, pursuant to the Secretary-General's recommendation, to identify some of the policy implications emerging from the reform process and, if so, what they were, how they could be incorporated into the work being done by the system - for example, by the functional commissions - and how they would affect the strengthening of country-level cooperation.

Efforts to elaborate and implement a strategic framework for Afghanistan were an important activity that would allow for system-wide promotion of a more consistent, effective approach to post-conflict situations. The Secretariat should explain the lessons learnt from that experience and describe the plans being made in relation to new strategic frameworks.

There was a need for a closer relationship with the business community and

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civil society to let them know what the United Nations system was doing and encourage the private sector to become more involved. The European Union fully supported such an approach, which was beneficial to both sides, and would like to know what practical steps had been taken or were envisaged to meet that objective.

Mr. LAVROV (Russian Federation) said that the frequent contacts between the Council and ACC should allow for informal consideration of the issues that arose and closer relations between the two bodies; he welcomed the steps taken to improve coordination in the United Nations system through ACC and encouraged the Secretary-General to continue his efforts in that direction.

Coordination between the Council and ACC should be based on a reciprocal relationship so that the Council could respond in a substantive way to the proposals and ideas put forward by other organizations of the system and the ACC secretariat. That exchange of information had not always been satisfactory.

He welcomed the fostering of relations between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions, which had provided the framework for the 1998 meetings and other forthcoming meetings, and the special attention that the Secretary-General was giving to encouraging those relations and to establishing a new international financial structure; he wished to know, however, how country-level coordination would be implemented and how the Bretton Woods institutions could better interact with the countries.

It would have been preferable if the report of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs had been distributed to the members of the Council before its release to the press; it was important to know whether there were any plans to consider it together with the Bretton Woods institutions and, if so, how, when and where that debate would take place.

With regard to the revitalization of the Council, the proposed application of Article 65 of the Charter deserved support. However, it was an issue which also depended on the Security Council. In the case of Haiti, for example, the Security Council could hold consultations with the Economic and Social Council, because the solution to the problem required the participation of the entire system, since the presence of peacekeeping forces was insufficient, and economic assistance was needed to help Haiti overcome the socio-economic crisis it was facing.

He endorsed the President's request that every effort should be made to

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enable the Council to meet again in its own Chamber.

Mr. KOLBY (Norway) said his delegation attached great importance to the work of ACC and the interaction between it and the Council to improve coordination between the Secretariat and intergovernmental levels. Although ACC was primarily a forum for inter-agency coordination, it would be appreciated if an information summary of the outcome of its meetings could be made available to the Council.

To effectively address the main problems, cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary approaches were increasingly required. The Secretary-General's report, "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform", proposed that ACC should consider the need to systematically introduce issue management methods and techniques at the inter-agency level (A/51/950, action 28), which would have implications for the ways in which United Nations organizations cooperated with other organizations and institutions. His delegation attached particular importance to progress in that area and would therefore appreciate information on any relevant ACC discussions and proposals.

The reorganization of United Nations activities in the humanitarian field, in particular the establishment of the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, had contributed to better coordination and more effective assistance, although much remained to be done at the country level. The strategic frameworks played a key role in that respect and should encompass common planning and consider humanitarian assistance in a longer-term development perspective to facilitate the transition to sustainable development through reconciliation, democracy and respect for human rights. The United Nations was uniquely placed to ensure such broad-based strategies for coordination of international humanitarian assistance. However, that would require even further efforts to improve inter-agency coordination, inter alia through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and ACC, as a basis for concerted collaboration with other entities. That area should be given due attention both at the Secretariat level and by the Council, particularly in the context of its humanitarian segment.

Mr. Valdivieso (Colombia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) said that he endorsed the seven-point programme proposed by the President with a view to the revitalization of the Council, and that the statement on the work of ACC presented by the Secretary-

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General responded to the requests contained in the Council's resolution. It would therefore be useful to give some indication to that effect in the Journal and in the agenda of the next organizational session, to draw attention to it and possibly attract more participation by delegations.

The annual report on the work of ACC in 1998 was not yet available; however, it was expected that it would be ready for the substantive session. In the next few years it would be helpful to have an informal summary of the work of ACC circulated prior to the Secretary-General's statement at the organizational session, so that delegations could refer to areas of interest to them, making the dialogue more beneficial.

It would also be useful to consider the possibility of examining the report on the work of ACC during the coordination segment in future, instead of during the general segment.

With regard to the Council's resolution 1998/46, on the subsidiary bodies identified for restructuring and revitalization, he asked how ACC had considered that resolution and what the outcome had been with regard to its implications for inter-agency coordination, since it affected not only the functional commissions but also the regional commissions and specialized agencies.

It would also be good to know whether the regional financial institutions and promotion and development banks were participating in the dialogue with the international financial institutions, and how effective that dialogue had been.

Mr. DESAI (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs), replying to the questions asked, said that, pursuant to the Committee's original mandate, the reports on the activities of ACC had to be submitted to the Council in the spring session; however, the reporting mechanism must take into account the increase in the frequency of reports and in the volume of inter-agency work. Communication between ACC and the Council must be improved, and the coordination segment, in which Member States considered the activities of the entire system, was therefore a key element. Thanks to the discussions during that segment, positive results had been achieved in relation to the HIV/AIDS programme. As part of that process, a study should be made on how the reporting mechanisms could help to achieve the objectives at the Secretariat and intergovernmental levels.

ACC had considered the implications of reform policies and had come up with the idea of strategic frameworks, which had to be applied in very difficult

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situations in the field.

As for links with businesses, the Secretary-General had suggested the idea of an agreement with the business community to enable its policies to help consolidate the goals of the United Nations in the fields of social development, economic development, environmental management, human rights and trade union rights, among others. It was to be hoped that ACC and the Economic and Social Council would establish a forum for dialogue in the framework of the coordination segment to strengthen the Council's capacity as the coordination body guiding the work of other bodies towards the achievement of given objectives. The Secretariat was endeavouring to increase its capacity to help the Council to make its coordination more effective and avoid wasting efforts and resources.

The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.