



Economic and Social Council

Provisional
6 October 2000

Original: English

Substantive session of 2000

Coordination segment

Provisional summary record of the 17th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 10 July 2000 at 10:00 a.m.

President: Mr. Pfanzelter (Vice-President) (Austria)

Contents

Coordination of the policies and activities of the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system

- (a) Assessment of the progress made within the United Nations system, through the conference reviews, in the promotion of an integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Corrections to this record should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent *within one week of the date of this document* to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza.

*In the absence of Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia),
Mr. Pfanzelter (Austria), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

The meeting was called to order at 10:20 a.m.

**Coordination of the policies and activities of the
specialized agencies and other bodies of the
United Nations system**

**(a) Assessment of the progress made within the
United Nations system, through the conference
reviews, in the promotion of an integrated and
coordinated implementation of and follow-up to
major United Nations conferences and summits
in the economic, social and related fields
(E/2000/57)**

1. **Mr. Civili** (Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs), introducing the report of the Secretary-General contained in document E/2000/57, said that the coordination segment of the Economic and Social Council sought to highlight the commitments made to advance the development goals of the global conferences held during the 1990s, and to determine how internal processes could help maintain political momentum in order to maximize efforts to attain those goals and achieve the broader objectives of combating poverty and marginalization. He expressed the hope that the Council would not only address the review processes and ways to enhance their effectiveness, but also focus on how policy development could best serve to achieve conference objectives in an integrated and mutually reinforcing manner.

2. Implicit in the structure and content of the report of the Secretary-General was an effort to assist the Council in undertaking three interrelated tasks. Firstly, it provided an opportunity for the Council to consider the strengthening of conference reviews. To that end, the report proposed a number of procedural options at intergovernmental levels. Secondly, the Council's task of developing and elaborating the concept of an integrated and coordinated implementation of conference outcomes, and promoting policies and practices that could further that approach had been one of its significant accomplishments which, regrettably, had not been given full recognition. Second only to the conferences themselves, the Council had been a major rallying point for inter-agency collaboration and focus

of a close and productive partnership with the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC).

3. The Council had consistently targeted crucial goals, including poverty eradication, gender equality and human rights. Support it provided to developing countries in strengthening their data collection and analysis capabilities and related work on indicators had contributed to efforts to deal with important cross-cutting issues. Furthermore, the Council had demonstrated its capacity and rich experience in systematically harnessing the contributions of non-governmental organizations, the private sector and other major groups to bolster the outcome of the follow-up processes. Lastly, in addition to its coordination responsibilities, the Council could further enhance policy development by providing technical cooperation guidance within the context of the operational activities segment as well as to its subsidiary bodies during the general segment.

4. At both the policy and operational levels, through deepening dialogue with the Bretton Woods institutions, the refinement of tools and the establishment of thematic groups on key conference topics, the United Nations system was making steady progress in supporting conference goals. The Council's role in guiding those efforts was crucial and it had already established a record of achievement on which to build.

5. **Mr. Anaedu** (Observer for the Federal Republic of Nigeria), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the report of the Secretary-General provided an incisive analysis of conference reviews. The key concern for developing countries was the lack of implementation of conference outcomes and the inability of developed countries to live up to their international commitments. In spite of conscious efforts, developing countries remained unable to mobilize adequate domestic resources. At the same time, official development assistance (ODA) and the resource base of various United Nations bodies involved in the implementation of outcomes had declined steeply over recent years.

6. The main conference bodies should decide on the timing and nature of reviews on a case-by-case basis, clearly identifying the goals and scope of the review, and critically addressing the extent of implementation of conference goals and objectives.

7. The Group of 77 and China fully supported the views expressed in the report on rooting the reviews in national and regional experience and technical assessments. Nevertheless, the Group acknowledged that while United Nations bodies had the right to experiment with various assessment indicators, their application in reports must be done through an intergovernmental process.

8. The Council should continue to consider the means of implementing conference outcomes and the improvement of follow-up mechanisms. It should also marshal its energies in order to encourage meaningful partnerships leading to appropriate measures and actions for the fulfilment of commitments, especially those related to external debt and poverty reduction.

9. **Mr. Fonseca** (Brazil) said that the sense of frustration often caused by the perception that the results of global conferences were uneven or non-existent should not weaken the collective will of the international community, nor should it allow a reversal of positive trends. Rather, the focus should be on the deployment of additional efforts. He endorsed the steps to be taken to improve conference reviews, underscoring the notion that special sessions or conferences should be considered only in those cases requiring political decisions at the highest level.

10. Stressing the need for the involvement of regional commissions and experts from developing countries in the review process and the value of South-South cooperation, he concluded by stressing that international support must include transfer of technology, solutions for the external debt problem, improvement in financial flows and full market access for products and services emanating from developing countries.

11. **Mr. Levitte** (France), speaking on behalf of the European Union and the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey, said that implementation and follow-up of the outcome of the major United Nations conferences and summit meetings held in the 1990s had become one of the priorities of the international community and related to no less than three of the items, numbers 4 (a), 6 and 10, on the current agenda of the Council.

12. The report of the Secretary-General for the coordination segment (E/2000/57) presented a forthright and lucid discussion of the problems

encountered with recent five-year reviews, which largely coincided with those identified by the European Union. Some of the valid criticisms made were that five years constituted too short a period for significant implementation; that negotiation of the outcome documents had been prolonged by a temptation to reopen issues settled at the conferences; that the outcome documents had in some cases contradicted each another on cross-cutting issues; that reviews had failed to give sufficient weight to national reports and the contribution of expert groups; and there had been insufficient participation at the reviews by the specialized agencies and civil society. The specific recommendations laid out in the report pointed in the right direction.

13. In considering reviews of conferences, it might be useful to draw a distinction between the technical and political levels of follow-up and review. The technical level involved an evaluation of the extent of implementation in each country of the commitments undertaken at the conference, and much of that was dealt with in the functional commissions. The political level involved the identification of new objectives and the launching of new initiatives. In some cases, regular review appeared desirable. In others, a review of a political nature at a pre-set interval was not necessarily justified. The holding of a such a review should be decided on a case-by-case basis.

14. The European Union believed that the technical content of conference reviews should be strengthened. There should be greater use of national and regional follow-up efforts, input by expert groups and involvement by the specialized agencies, regional commissions and Bretton Woods institutions. In particular, the participation of experts from developing countries at meetings of the functional commissions should be strongly encouraged, with financial support for experts from the least developed countries.

15. The European Union attached great importance to the development of a limited set of common indicators, which would be invaluable to the functional commissions in evaluating progress. Accurate national reports with reliable statistics would remain indispensable, however, and that would require renewed effort to strengthen the administrative and statistical capacity of developing countries.

16. The Union strongly supported the recommendation of the Secretary-General that only one

conference review should be held in any given year. To make that possible, the idea of clustering the review of conferences with closely related themes deserved consideration.

17. The criticisms he had made in no way reflected a lack of interest in conference follow-up but rather a conviction that better organized and more sharply targeted reviews would better enable the international community to achieve its goals.

18. **Mr. Martinez-Aguilar** (Mexico) said that conducting reviews of each of the major United Nations conferences and summits was vital to ensuring that effect was given to the political consensus reached by the international community at those events. That was why the coordinating role of the Council in the treatment of the common themes of United Nations conferences and summits had been strengthened, without affecting the pre-eminent role of the General Assembly. The international community must persevere in its efforts to ensure the achievement of the goals and commitments it had set for itself, share its experiences and identify and overcome obstacles that might prevent the attainment of those goals and adjust its policies and strategies accordingly.

19. In order to obtain the best possible results, the methods of reviewing the major United Nations conferences and summits should be improved inter alia by more intensive preparatory work, including regional consultations. Duplication of efforts could also be avoided by staggering the review periods and improving cooperation among the follow-up bodies. Another option would be to rationalize the review cycles by spacing the special sessions of the General Assembly over 10 years.

20. **Mr. Liu Jingtao** (China) said that there was a long way to go before the goals of the major United Nations conferences and summits could be achieved. Indeed, the application of the recommendations of those conferences and summits had been hampered in particular by the attitude of developed countries that failed to fulfil their commitments with respect to the transfer of resources and technology. Moreover, the international community routinely failed to take into account the specific situations of different recipient countries in dealing with financial crises or formulating economic and social policy recommendations, thus adversely affecting the economic and social sectors of those countries.

21. The integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow up to major conferences and summits called for both national and international efforts, especially within the United Nations system and particularly through the Council. He therefore called on the international community to demonstrate political sincerity and honour its commitments for the common prosperity of mankind.

22. His delegation supported the Council's efforts to strengthen its coordination and guidance to its subsidiary bodies as well as its contact with other funds and programmes. It also welcomed the strengthening of exchanges and dialogue between the Council and United Nations specialized agencies, including the Bretton Woods Institutions. He hoped that the operations of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) would become more transparent and that the Committee would provide more timely briefings to Member States on the results of its conferences.

23. His delegation proposed that only one conference review should be held in any given year; failing that, there should be a sufficient interval between reviews. His delegation was not opposed to the recommendation that plus-five conference reviews and appraisals could be conducted by the relevant functional commissions, the Council or the General Assembly, while special sessions of the latter should be held only once every 10 years. However, his delegation had doubts as to the feasibility of clustering the review of several programmes of action.

24. While his delegation welcomed the participation of civil society organizations in implementing and reviewing the outcomes of major conferences and their follow-up actions, it believed that the Council needed to formulate relevant regulations governing the participation of such organizations. Efforts should also be made to ensure a balance in that regard between developing and developed countries.

25. **Mr. Grutle** (Norway) said that the assessment of progress and identification of obstacles were the core elements of conference reviews. In his opinion, the increased involvement of civil society had been one of the most important outcomes of global conferences and their review. Given the far-reaching effects of such involvement, it was important to keep up the momentum created through partnership.

26. He pointed out some of the obstacles encountered in the review processes, namely, time allocation, reopening of substantive issues, the short time span between conferences and reviews, and the nature and format of the reporting process. There was likewise much scope for representation from the least developed countries, gender mainstreaming and the incorporation of Council guidelines since 1995.

27. Based on the proposal in paragraph 33 (b) of the Secretary-General's report to cluster the reviews, he fully supported the recommendation in paragraph 44 inviting the functional commissions to review options and modalities for future conference reviews, after which the Council should provide guidance to facilitate the deliberations of the commissions. He therefore expressed the hope that the issue would be further elaborated during the finalization of the agreed conclusions.

28. **Ms. Castro** (Cuba) expressed concern at the delays in the distribution of documentation, which could hamper the progress of negotiations and discussions. The reviews that had been conducted thus far showed that all actors — the United Nations system as well as civil society — needed to make a joint effort to implement the objectives of the different conferences. Experience had shown that five years was too short a period to carry out an objective evaluation of the impact of the policies adopted. The functional commissions should consider various alternatives and decide how the next reviews would be carried out. In that regard, she endorsed options (c) and (d) in paragraph 33 of the report of the Secretary-General (E/2000/57).

29. The Council itself should set the example for the integrated follow-up of issues during the coordination segment by establishing clear-cut targets. In that regard, while it had been decided that indicators were important, especially in connection with the gathering of information on and design of policies in developing countries, not much had been accomplished beyond rhetoric. That was an ideal issue for the Council to consider. It was regrettable that more emphasis was put on the commitments of developing countries than on the responsibilities of developed countries, especially with respect to official development assistance and the transfer of technology. The Council's coordination function should be strengthened while the decisions of ACC should be made subject to consultations with the Council.

30. **Mr. Helg** (Observer for Switzerland) said that the Council should recommend that the review conferences as well as the functional commissions should focus on core issues within their mandates. Related or general issues should be dealt with in the appropriate framework. In that connection, he wondered whether the discussions on a considerable number of cross-cutting issues could not be given new focus, for example, by the Council. That would provide an opportunity every year for the Council to review the framework conditions for development, which would then be taken up by other United Nations bodies, including the review conferences. It was regrettable, however, that certain agreed goals had been challenged only five years after their adoption.

31. His delegation, like many others, felt that review conferences should take place only every 10 years, and that the functional commissions should be responsible for their follow-up during the intervals between reviews. There was a good case for designating specific United Nations bodies such as the funds and programmes or specialized agencies as task managers for the 10-year reviews. The processes should be carefully prepared, especially at the national and regional levels. In that regard, the United Nations operational system should provide appropriate assistance, especially under the United Nations Development Assistance Framework.

32. There was no advantage in establishing clusters, as suggested in paragraph 33 (b) of the Secretary-General's report. There should be a thorough examination of the goals of the conferences not only by the commissions, but also by all the Secretariat bodies involved, especially the task managers. For purposes of the holistic integration of conference recommendations at the global level, the Secretariat should pursue and deepen systematic analyses. Moreover, it was urgent to make progress with respect to the definition of simple and reliable global indicators for each of the development objectives recognized by the international community. His delegation welcomed the fact that preparations for the 2001 high-level international intergovernmental event on financing for development had started. All possible measures must be taken to ensure that such preparations also helped to improve the integrated follow-up to and achievement of the goals of the major conferences.

33. **Ms. King** (United States of America) supported the statement made by the representative of France.

The Secretary-General's report and recommendations provided a good basis for discussions. Her delegation had a number of concerns: first, issues that had already been decided should not be reopened; second, too much time was devoted to non-core issues, while issues were repeated across reviews. In that regard, her delegation endorsed the recommendations in paragraph 10 of the Secretary-General's report.

34. She agreed with many previous speakers that there should be no automatic review. In some cases, a technical review rather than a broad political review would be sufficient. She agreed that five years was too short a period to assess the implementation of objectives, as it did not take into account the constraints encountered by the countries concerned. There had been too much focus on financing for development. The major issue for the Council over the next three days would be to strengthen coordination and devise a thematic review mechanism.

35. **Mr. Šimonović** (Croatia) said that, in examining the lessons to be learned from past five-year reviews, the Council should consider not only the outcome documents but also the path travelled in negotiating them, since process was as important as outcome. Although costly and time-consuming, review processes could help engender the political will of Governments to reaffirm commitment to conference goals. His delegation thought that a five-year interval was the appropriate length of time for review of conference results, given the rapid pace of change in the modern world.

36. National reporting on conference implementation was important in helping countries to assess progress and to stimulate them to new efforts in implementing conference outcomes. Regional preparatory meetings enabled the countries to exchange experiences, but could serve also to shorten the negotiating process of the actual review. His delegation believed that negotiations should be conducted only when there was a potential for progress, not merely a repetition of agreed language.

37. The successful use of the Internet to meet the need to involve civil society to a greater extent in five-year reviews prior to the five-year review of the Fourth World Conference on Women was encouraging. It was also worth noting that the increasing use of information and communications technology in conference rooms

should help to accelerate negotiations and production of documents.

38. In considering the different options for future reviews, the national, regional and international effects of each option should be considered. His delegation was favourable to the idea of holding some reviews as special meetings of the Council. The functional commissions should continue to exercise primary responsibility for the follow-up and review process, however, with frequent cooperation, for example, through regular meetings, of their chairmen or other officers. Coordinated follow-up implied that the major conferences, while having their own thematic unity, should be viewed as interlinked and contributing to an integrated framework of development. Through the development of common indicators and cooperation between functional commissions, it should be possible in the medium term to achieve an overview of the progress made at all the global conferences.

39. **Mr. Kobayashi** (Japan) said that an unusual number of global conferences on serious, cross-cutting issues had been held under United Nations auspices in the 1990s. What was of paramount importance, of course, was to implement the plans of action adopted and work towards the goals identified, with responsibility falling on the countries themselves and on the international community to assist their efforts. Review meetings were intended for the secondary function of assessing progress in that implementation and should be better organized for greater efficiency.

40. Holding review meetings in the form of international conferences or special sessions of the General Assembly could be useful in engendering the political momentum to fulfil the commitments made at global conferences, raising popular awareness of the issues and alerting the international community to new challenges. However, there had been a tendency to hold special sessions automatically and hence too frequently, and the outcome documents had been too long and vague and had covered too broad a range of issues.

41. His delegation proposed that five- and ten-year reviews should not be held automatically but only after serious consideration of the progress made or the emergence of new challenges. Review should first take place in the course of the regular work of the Economic and Social Council, its functional commissions and the Main Committees of the General Assembly. If the need

for a special review process was confirmed, the first option to be considered should be a special meeting of the Council or one of its subsidiary bodies. Serious thought should be given to the question before deciding to hold an international review conference or a special session of the General Assembly for a five-year review, and such special sessions or review conferences should be limited to one a year, if possible, or, at the very least, spaced as widely as possible. Consideration should be given to grouping several closely related themes together.

42. The outcome documents should be as concise as possible and focus on core issues. Matters requiring specific expertise should be entrusted to the functional commissions or other competent bodies.

43. The Council might wish to agree on the various options for organizing future review meetings and to form a small group of interested delegations to continue its consideration. At next year's substantive session, after receiving input from the functional commissions and the Secretariat, the Council could take a final decision.

44. **The President** invited the representative of the International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres (IFS) to address the Council.

45. **Ms. Lubin** (International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres) said that, despite the tremendous effort put into review events, it was apparent in retrospect that the documents emerging from those reviews had not progressed to the extent hoped. That was particularly evident in the results of the five-year reviews of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Agenda 21) and the World Summit for Social Development. Lack of progress had been due in part to the lack of will of many of the participating Governments and in part to the requirement that the document represent a consensus, which had resulted in a "common denominator" outcome; it had been exacerbated by the desire of many representatives to cling to agreed language rather than risk their Government's disapproval of new initiatives.

46. A striking example was the treatment of the issue of elimination of poverty and how it related to globalization. The situation of the poor had been acknowledged, but the actions proposed had been fragmented and in some cases counterproductive. A notable exception was employment policy. All

groups — the private sector, trade unions and the self-employed — had agreed that priority must be given to programmes to provide employment to the unemployed, the underemployed and the unskilled. The leadership role of the International Labour Organization (ILO) had been recognized. The focus on "decent" work for all could be the basis of future action.

47. In the related field of trade and open bargaining, only generalizations had been agreed upon, and the World Trade Organization stood as an example of fragmentation rather than coordination.

48. No forward-looking proposals had emerged in the area of basic social services, and there was real danger that the outcome of the five-year review of the International Conference on Population and Development would prove hard to implement. The need for health and education services had been recognized, but there had been little mention of the broader range of preventive and supportive social services, community organization and local needs assessments. The latter required appropriate social indicators, an area where coordination was lacking, since Governments, international organizations and private research bodies all used different and sometimes conflicting definitions and standards.

49. In the area of housing, agendas resulting from the various previous conferences on the subject differed. Perhaps they could be harmonized at the five-year review of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

50. Closer relations should be maintained between the bodies responsible for implementation of agreed programmes. A start had been made in the meetings between the Council and the Bretton Woods institutions and in the inclusion of the World Trade Organization on the Council's panel discussions. The functional commissions should meet regularly to coordinate their approaches. The United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization and the Human Rights Commission should participate in preparations for and the proceedings of the upcoming five-year review of the World Summit for Children. The Commission on Social Development should be aware of the need for greater coordination on the issues of youth and ageing and inter-generational programmes.

51. Her organization strongly supported the proposals for debt forgiveness but believed that the item should be dealt with in another forum.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.