



Economic and Social Council

Provisional

11 April 2001

English

Original: French

Organizational session for 2001

Provisional summary record of the 1st meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 29 January 2001, at 11 a.m.

Temporary President: Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia)

President: Mr. Belinga-Eboutou (Cameroon)

Contents

Expression of sympathy in connection with the recent earthquakes in El Salvador,
India and Pakistan

Opening of the session

Election of the Bureau

Organization of work

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.



The meeting was called to order at 11.15 a.m.

Expression of sympathy in connection with the recent earthquakes in El Salvador, India and Pakistan

1. **The Temporary President**, speaking on behalf of the members of the Economic and Social Council, expressed the Council's sympathy to the Governments and peoples of El Salvador, India and Pakistan in connection with the recent earthquakes that had devastated their countries. He applauded the efforts being made by the affected populations and the authorities to cope with the disasters and hoped that the international community would take all necessary measures on an urgent basis and that the Council would do everything in its power to assist the victims of a tragedy that had shocked the entire world.

2. *At the invitation of the Temporary President, the members of the Council observed a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of the earthquake victims.*

Opening of the session

3. **The Temporary President** declared open the organizational session of the Economic and Social Council for 2001.

4. He reiterated, on his own behalf, condolences to the families of the victims of the earthquakes in El Salvador, India and Pakistan, as well as to the peoples and Governments of those countries.

5. He recalled that each year in the Economic and Social Council the handover by the departing officers provided an occasion for assessing what progress had been achieved and what remained to be done, for reviewing the past and planning for the future. He warmly thanked the delegations of member States and observer States, the Secretariat staff, in particular the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General, and the representatives of the organizations in the United Nations system for the valuable assistance they had given to him throughout the year as he carried out his tasks and for their untiring efforts to improve the condition of the poor and the disenfranchised. He also thanked the other members of the Bureau, who had helped to create a positive environment for a productive year.

6. Looking back on the past year, he noted that the Council's agenda for development had moved forward in several respects. Among its six priorities for 2000,

the Council had selected one — information and communication technologies — as the major theme for its high-level segment. Those technologies had thus been recognized not only as the most powerful technological revolution of today's world and the driving force of globalization but also as an excellent mechanism for promoting equality in economic growth and development and narrowing the gap between the developed and the developing countries. Conversely, it had been stressed that countries without access to such technologies, particularly the developing countries, ran the severe risk of being by-passed and marginalized. In seeking to heighten awareness of that important factor for development, the Council had organized, in preparation for the high-level segment, a series of discussions on the subject of information and communication technologies and development and regional meetings in Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition, there had been various activities by organizations within the United Nations system and other regional and international organizations.

7. Those activities, which had been both stimulating and productive, had helped to make the Council a more open, strategic forum for all high-level officials and key players. He took personal pride in the emphasis placed on inclusive participation; the discussions had made it abundantly clear that closing the development gap could not be the sole responsibility of any one group of stakeholders and that as many players as possible, including the private sector, must be involved. In that regard, he was encouraged to note that preparations for the 2001 high-level segment on support for the efforts of African countries to achieve sustainable development and the coordination segment on the promotion of development were being carried out in that participatory spirit. The Council should continue on that path, which promoted innovation and partnership, despite the uncertainty, discomfort and even mistrust that such an undertaking might generate.

8. In 2000, that inclusive approach had resulted in a plethora of formal and informal meetings, including, for the first time, the holding of ministerial round-table breakfasts that provided a relaxed setting for exchanges of views and, at Headquarters, the staging of an information and communication technologies (ICT) exhibit with 40 exhibitors. For the first time, the United Nations had acted as an interface between the world of ICT, the private sector and world multilateral

diplomacy. The high-level segment had culminated for the first time in a Ministerial Declaration that constituted a blueprint for the use of ICT to promote development; the Declaration had been recognized at the G-8 Summit and endorsed by Heads of State and Government at the Millennium Summit. He hoped that the Council would continue to build on that momentum and translate that blueprint into tangible action on the ground in order to bridge the growing digital divide, foster digital opportunities and unlock the enormous potential of ICT for development. However, there was a need to better determine the specificities for United Nations engagement in that area, including the framework for the ICT Task Force.

9. Another priority issue for 2000 had been the need to improve continuity in the Council's work. Crucial to that objective was assertion of the Council's central coordinating role and its revitalization as the primary United Nations body dealing with economic and social issues. Significant progress had been achieved in that area: for the first time, the Council had directly addressed the mechanisms and processes of reviewing the implementation of major United Nations conferences and summits, taking decisive albeit initial steps to move the process forward. It had also defined parameters for the continuation and hoped-for completion of that urgent work at its next session and had held a meeting with the Rome-based agencies in an effort to establish closer relations and organize regular meetings between the Council and the specialized agencies of the United Nations system. The purpose of that dialogue, the theme of which had been "Eliminating hunger in the new millennium" and which had focused on Africa, had been to promote overall policy coordination and coherence within the system.

10. Top priority had also been given to enhancing the Council's ability to respond in a timely manner to new economic and social issues such as natural disasters. In March 2000, it had been able to convene a meeting to discuss the provision of guidance to United Nations agencies in the field in order to help them solve the tragic situation in Mozambique in the wake of devastating floods. The Council had called on governments, the United Nations, its specialized agencies and other bodies, the international financial institutions, non-governmental organizations and the private sector to coordinate their efforts in order to provide Mozambique with the continuum of assistance

that it needed in order to move from relief to eventual reconstruction and development.

11. Another of the Council's priorities had been to intensify its contact and cooperation with the Bretton Woods institutions, particularly at the high-level meeting held in April with the participation of ministers of finance, development and foreign affairs; that meeting had promoted free-flowing dialogue between policy makers. The high-level policy dialogue with the heads of international financial and trade organizations, held at the substantive session in July, and the closer contact maintained between the Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) had also facilitated coherence; he hoped that such partnerships would continue to develop.

12. Lastly, the departing Bureau had endeavoured to advance the overriding thrust of the Council's millennium agenda by helping it to realize its full potential in the promotion of social and economic development as envisaged by the Charter and to continue its ongoing renaissance. While there had been other issues on the Council's agenda, in a changing social and economic landscape where new actors and challenges abounded, the Council had needed to build on its strengths and core principles while remaining open and flexible in striving to fulfil its mandate.

13. He wished the new President every success and said he hoped that the Council would continue its renaissance and attain its full potential under the Charter.

Election of the Bureau

14. **The Temporary President** said that, in accordance with rule 18 of the Council's rules of procedure, in the election of the President, there should be equitable geographical rotation of that office among the regional groups; according to that rotation, the President of the Council for 2001 must be a representative of the Group of African States. He informed the Council that the Group had nominated Mr. Martin Belinga-Eboutou (Cameroon) for the office of President of the Council for 2001.

15. *Mr. Martin Belinga-Eboutou (Cameroon) was elected President by acclamation.*

16. *Mr. Martin Belinga-Eboutou (Cameroon) took the Chair.*

17. **The President**, paying tribute to the outgoing President, welcomed the revitalization of the Council's working methods and the new pattern of discussions, which now also involved new development partners. He also noted that, under the impetus provided by the outgoing President, ICT had received deserved attention. Aware of the magnitude of the task facing the Council at the beginning of the new millennium, he emphasized that, after having long been overshadowed by ideological and military considerations, the Council had three years previously again become the leading player in the area of economic and social development. It should now regain its place at the core of international cooperation and work for consensus on the issues of concern to the peoples of the world: poverty relief, HIV/AIDS and dissemination of ICT. It should also take part in the final consideration of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s, in which the international community had undertaken to assist Africa in its development efforts. The Council's work programme was very ambitious and would focus on two tasks: firstly, formulating policies in the economic and social spheres and guiding and coordinating the development activities of the United Nations system with a view to achieving consistency and, secondly, directing the work of the subsidiary organs and intergovernmental mechanisms placed under the Council's authority.

18. The Council would make a decisive contribution to the implementation of the Millennium Declaration (A/RES/55/2), in which Heads of State and Government had reaffirmed their faith in the values which were the *raison d'être* of the Council, defined the guiding principles which it should follow and set priorities for the international community in the twenty-first century. In particular, section VII of the Declaration emphasized the importance attached to the special needs of Africa. The high-level debate concerning support for the efforts of African countries to achieve sustainable development would provide the Council with an opportunity to give tangible evidence of its commitment by guiding and coordinating development initiatives by the United Nations system in favour of Africa. Although undeniable progress had been made, it had to be recognized that there had also been disappointments and that much still remained to be done. The plethora of discussions, programmes and

initiatives had perhaps caused the international community to lose its sense of priorities. There was a need for determined and generous efforts to help Africa to take its rightful place on the world stage. He suggested that, before the high-level debate, the Council should conduct a review of all United Nations programmes over the past 30 years; once the international community had freed itself from the shackles of the past, it could make a new beginning based on the Millennium Declaration and build a new alliance for the development of Africa. The Council should also interest itself in initiatives by other development stakeholders, in order to benefit from them. In a desire to enrich its high-level debate and the work of the General Assembly, particularly in relation to the assessment of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s, it would also involve itself in the activities of the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS and the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa. The Council should try to target its activities more precisely, by defining a consistent and concrete framework so that the United Nations system could genuinely help Africa. At its substantive session in July 2001, it should endeavour to secure cooperation by all actors: decision makers in the industrialized and developing countries, United Nations bodies, international financial institutions, the private sector and non-governmental organizations. The Bureau would propose a programme of meetings for that purpose, to be held before and during the high-level segment, and the Council should encourage Ministers to take part in preparations for the triennial policy review of operational activities for development to be undertaken by the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session.

19. He drew the Council's attention to the flagrant inequalities between African countries and the industrialized nations in the area of ICT, regarding both user costs and coverage and hardware. Delegations should remember such issues when they considered the Secretary-General's recommendations for the creation of a working group on ICT, which were the fruit of lengthy consultations with all the competent actors. The Council would discuss the issue of ICT at its coordination segment in the context of the role of the United Nations in promoting development. It would seek to better define the ICT issue and strengthen

cooperation with the various partners, including the public and private sectors and non-governmental organizations, the goal being to use those technologies in the interests of development. The Council would have to show a real capacity for analysis, decision-making and action. He would propose to the Bureau that an international symposium should be held in Yaoundé on the connection of Africa to the World Wide Web; an international exhibition would be held at the same time on the subject of new ICT.

20. The Council should also endeavour to give new impetus to the dialogue on humanitarian affairs — a highly important issue on which, unfortunately, negotiations had been unsuccessful in 2000. The Council should provide guidance and oversight to activities in that area, especially in light of the suffering of the peoples of El Salvador, India and Pakistan.

21. With respect to coordination issues, he noted that the agreed conclusions adopted by the Council were widely used by the various United Nations bodies, particularly those concerning the implementation of resolutions and decisions adopted at the major conferences of the 1990s and follow-up thereto. In view of the problems stemming from the sheer number of events and periodic reviews, the Council had used its experience in conference follow-up to develop a review and monitoring framework to speed up the implementation of texts adopted at conferences; to that end, it had requested assistance from the functional commissions, which were primarily responsible for conference follow-up. He planned to give that matter the attention it deserved and to do his utmost to ensure that the various questions before the Council received due consideration; that would require better time and resource management in order to prevent a recurrence of the unfortunate events that had occurred during the general debate in 2000.

22. The high-level meetings between the Council and the Bretton Woods institutions were a means of cooperation that was useful in guiding the reform of the international financial system and better identifying its implications for development objectives. The current year's meeting, which would provide another opportunity to evaluate the international community's role in development activities and in the elaboration of policies adapted to a changing world, would take on particular importance in light of the ongoing discussions on financing for development.

23. He hoped to consolidate past achievements, including the consensus on policies and programmes, participation of all development partners and rationalization of the Council's work; to make the development of Africa a priority issue, as ICT had been in 2000; to stress the importance of an integrated and coordinated follow-up to major United Nations conferences and to continue to rationalize the Council's methods of work.

24. In accordance with rule 18 of its rules of procedure, the Council must elect four Vice-Presidents. After consultations between the regional groups, the following candidates had been nominated. Mr. Šimonović (Croatia), Eastern European States; Mr. Niehaus (Costa Rica), Latin American and Caribbean States; Mr. Monteiro (Portugal), Western European and other States; and Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic), Asian States.

25. *Mr. Šimonović (Croatia), Mr. Niehaus (Costa Rica), Mr. Monteiro (Portugal) and Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic) were elected Vice-Presidents of the Council for 2001 by acclamation.*

Organization of work

26. **The President** said that, by adopting its resolutions 1988/77 and 1989/114, the Council had decided on a number of measures designed to give new impetus and efficiency to its functioning. The General Assembly, in its resolutions 45/264, 48/162, 50/227 and 52/12 B, had also adopted important measures to restructure and revitalize the Council. In accordance with the directives provided in those resolutions, the Council would consider at its organizational session the provisional agenda for the session (E/2001/2) and a note by the Secretary-General containing the Council's proposed basic programme of work for 2001 and 2002 (E/2001/1). He also drew attention to several issues, indicated in the provisional agenda, on which a decision must be taken at the organizational session. In accordance with Council resolution 1988/77, paragraph 2 (l), he proposed to hold informal consultations on the planned programme of work and other organizational matters; on the basis of those consultations, the Bureau would submit recommendations to the Council at the next meeting.

27. Turning to the question of seating arrangements for delegations, he proposed that lots should be drawn to determine which delegation would occupy the first

seat. The delegation of Austria was thus selected and would be followed by Bahrain and the other delegations in alphabetical order.

28. **Mr. Augustsson** (Observer for Sweden), speaking on behalf of the European Union; Mr. Kobayashi (Japan); Mr. Zarie Zare (Islamic Republic of Iran), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China; and Ms. King (United States of America) congratulated Mr. Wibisono on his tenure as President of the Economic and Social Council in 2000; it had been a highly productive year, particularly in the area of ICT for development and that of coordination of the activities of United Nations bodies in the field of development. They welcomed the election of the new Bureau and assured its members of their full cooperation.

29. **Mr. Pal** (Observer for India) thanked the members of the Council for their gesture of solidarity at a time when his country had been struck by a major earthquake and conveyed his Government's appreciation for the offers of assistance and expressions of sympathy.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.