



# Economic and Social Council

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## Substantive session of 2014

High-level segment

### Summary record of the 34th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 9 July 2014, at 9 a.m.

*President:* Mr. Dabbashi (Vice-President) . . . . . (Libya)

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*In the absence of Mr. Sajdik (Austria), Mr. Dabbashi (Libya), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 9.20 a.m.*

**Annual ministerial review: Addressing ongoing and emerging challenges for meeting the Millennium Development Goals in 2015 and for sustaining development gains in the future** (*continued*)

*National voluntary presentations: Thailand, Mexico and Georgia (E/2014/59, E/2014/65 and E/2014/72)*

1. **The President** said that the national voluntary presentation process, which was intrinsic to the annual ministerial review, had enabled the Council to explore ways to address lags in progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), provided a platform where national implementation could connect with international policymaking and offered an opportunity to build linkages with the normative and operational areas of development in the work of the United Nations system. It would, however, be beneficial to establish a mechanism that allowed the presenting States to report back to the Council on progress in implementing recommendations emerging from the dialogue, as well as to link the presentations to United Nations capacity development work. Furthermore, the introduction of a standardized analytical framework could facilitate dialogue and scale up the benefits of the review. In 2014, the presentations would contribute to the formulation of the post-2015 development agenda.

2. He invited Mr. Mahmoud Mohieldin, Corporate Secretary and President's Special Envoy on the Millennium Development Goals, the Post-2015 Process and Financial Development, World Bank, to act as moderator for the national voluntary presentations.

*Thailand (E/2014/59)*

3. **Mr. Phuangketkeow** (Observer for Thailand), Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs, said that his country had achieved significant progress on a number of the MDGs. In particular, it had reached the Goal 1 target of halving poverty, although more work was needed to further reduce the proportion of people living below the poverty line and to address geographical inequalities. Further progress was also needed on Goal 7 on environmental sustainability,

notably in reducing carbon dioxide emissions, improving waste disposal, and implementing integrated environmental management.

4. At the core of Thailand's approach was the sufficiency economy philosophy introduced by King Bhumibol Adulyadej in 1975 and recognized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Successive Thai governments had maintained a firm political commitment to the MDGs, and technocrats had continued to work towards them, even in times of political uncertainty. Civil society had played an important role in monitoring Government efforts. Universal health coverage was an example of the success that could be achieved with a people-centred approach involving all stakeholders. Thailand had instituted universal health care in 2002, when its per capita GDP was less than US\$ 1,500, demonstrating that such coverage was not necessarily beyond the reach of a developing economy. The health coverage scheme had contributed to poverty eradication, improved the population's health and quality of life, and reduced the long-term cost of medical care. As a country located in the world's most disaster-prone region, Thailand also paid particular attention to mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into national development planning. It believed that preparedness and risk reduction were more cost-effective in the long run than emergency response after the fact.

5. Development policies needed to be evidence-driven and targeted based on the demographic make-up of beneficiary populations. Accountable, responsible and transparent institutions were a prerequisite; development without the rule of law would inevitably be undermined. His Government was also a strong advocate of regional integration and cooperation, which helped to reduce inequalities both between and within countries. Capacity-building in the areas of science, technology and innovation, which were crucial to development, should in particular be provided to developing countries with special needs, such as least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, and small island developing States. The Thailand International Development Cooperation Agency stood ready to share its development model with other developing countries. A smooth transition to the post-2015 development agenda was essential, and the unfinished business of the MDGs needed to be part of the discussion.

6. **Mr. Diallo** (Observer for Senegal), reviewer, said he was pleased to note that the Government of Thailand had already achieved most of the MDGs and was likely to meet all of them by 2015. He also commended it for its determination to achieve full employment and to combat such non-communicable diseases as tuberculosis, coronary heart disease and cancer. The health and fisheries cooperation programmes developed with Senegal were an example of the significant progress that Thailand had made in the area of development assistance. It was, however, clear from the national report that Thailand still needed to address a number of challenges to achieving the MDGs, including in the areas of child nutrition; workers' living standards; health, including HIV prevalence; education; public services; and urban/rural income inequalities. It should also pay greater attention to vulnerable groups, including migrants.

7. He asked what measures were envisaged to reduce the disproportionately high maternal and child mortality rates in mountainous areas. He also wished to know more about the role played by the private sector in achieving Goal 8 on developing a global partnership for development. Lastly, he wondered how the sufficiency economy philosophy had influenced the achievement of the MDGs and how it might affect the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda.

8. **Mr. Yoshikawa** (Japan), reviewer, said that Thailand had made great progress towards achievement of the MDGs. His delegation hoped that recent political problems would be overcome and democracy in Thailand quickly restored. Referring to the Thai Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, he wondered what added value human security might contribute to the post-2015 development agenda. He also wished to know how Thailand integrated the budgetary burden of universal health coverage into its economic policies, and requested further elaboration on the section of the report on good governance.

9. **Mr. Nguyen** The Phuon (Observer for Viet Nam), reviewer, said that Viet Nam and Thailand shared similar experiences in "localizing" MDG efforts by integrating them into national development plans. He commended Thailand for the considerable progress it had made in achieving several of the MDGs ahead of schedule, while noting that, even as it continued to establish a global reputation for its higher education system, it should take further steps to increase access to primary education. There was also

room for further improvement on Goal 7 concerning environmental sustainability. Demographic and geographical inequalities were a perennial problem that needed to be addressed in the post-2015 development agenda. His country was grateful for the development support that it had received from Thailand, and looked forward to continued close collaboration with it in the future, both bilaterally and within regional and international frameworks.

*Mexico (E/2014/65)*

10. **Mr. Lastiri Quirós** (Observer for Mexico), Deputy Secretary for Forecasting, Planning and Evaluation, Ministry of Social Development, said that of the 51 MDG indicators which applied to Mexico, 38 had already been achieved and 5 would be met in 2015. Goal 1 on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger had been achieved, with the proportion of the population earning less than US\$ 1.25 per day having been halved between 1989 and 2012. With regard to Goal 2, universal primary education had been achieved and the illiteracy rate among young people had fallen by two thirds. Among pupils who started the first year of primary school, the proportion completing primary education had risen from 75.1 per cent to 96.4 per cent. Progress had been made towards Goal 3 on promoting gender equality and empowering women, with the proportion of seats held by women in Congress having trebled between 1988 and 2012 to reach over a third of the total. Under an ongoing legal reform, 50 per cent of candidates in the 2015 elections must be women. The target ratio of girls to boys had been achieved at all educational levels except in primary education, where it had almost been reached. With regard to Goal 4, large decreases in the infant and under-five mortality rates between 1990 and 2012 meant that those rates were approaching the targets.

11. In relation to Goal 5, maternal mortality had been halved since 1990 but remained high, at 42.3 deaths per 100,000 live births. The proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel had risen from 76.7 per cent in 1990 to 96 per cent in 2012. Under Goal 6, the incidence of HIV/AIDS in 2012 had remained well below the target rate, while the incidence of malaria had decreased from 51.1 to 0.7 cases per 100,000 inhabitants. As for Goal 7 on environmental sustainability, the proportion of protected land and marine areas had increased from 7.1 per cent to 13.0 per cent. Sustainable access to

clean water and sanitation had also risen significantly. Mexico's efforts to develop a global partnership for development for the achievement of Goal 8 had resulted in a six-fold increase in the proportion of people with a mobile telephone subscription since 2000. In 2013, 43 per cent of the population had been Internet users.

12. To help achieve the MDGs, his Government had introduced social and economic inclusion strategies including the National Crusade against Hunger, coordinated by the Ministry of Social Development and designed to ensure zero hunger, eradicate child malnutrition, increase rural production and income, minimize post-harvest losses and food shortages and promote community participation. It also aimed to ensure a more cross-cutting approach in the federal public administration, coordination between the federal, state and municipal levels of government, and the participation of civil society and of citizens through community committees.

13. In order to build a prosperous and inclusive society, his Government had introduced the Pact for Mexico, which had brought together the three main parties, ended 15 years of legislative deadlock and had a substantial impact on the economy and society. In 2013-2014 Congress had approved economic reforms in the areas of energy, telecommunications, economic competition and finance; social reforms in education, tax and social security; and governance reforms related to the political and electoral system and transparency. Anti-corruption reforms were also pending approval.

14. With regard to the post-2015 development agenda, the main challenges were to introduce a multidimensional approach to fighting poverty; promote sustained and inclusive economic growth and inclusive and productive labour markets; achieve quality education; build a new universal health system; reduce maternal mortality, promote gender equality; expand the social protection network; strengthen the tax system; ensure more progressive social expenditure; and address climate change. The MDGs had been a successful experience for Mexico because they had led to strengthened cooperation between government institutions, improved statistical information systems and the sound monitoring and evaluation of public policy. As it prepared for the post-2015 development agenda, his Government recognized that social and economic exclusion required immediate

action and was committed to a multidimensional approach to poverty and inequality.

15. **Ms. Bustamante Suárez** (Observer for Peru), reviewer, said that Mexico's poverty eradication policies were good practices and should be shared, along with lessons learned. The multidimensional approach on which those policies were based addressed education gaps, access to health, social security, food, basic services, and housing quality. It reflected a more complete view of poverty, especially in middle-income countries such as Mexico and Peru, where monetary poverty was decreasing but the structural conditions of poverty remained. The solution was to coordinate action in all of those spheres and at all levels of government. In Peru, the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion was playing an active role in such a response.

16. Although poverty eradication had been established as a central objective in the strategic plans of various United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, the multidimensional nature of poverty should be taken into account in the methodology for classifying Member States as middle-income countries, low-income countries or net contributors for programmatic purposes. Income alone was clearly not a representative measure of the poverty eradication challenges facing developing countries, in particular middle-income countries, which accounted for over 70 per cent of the world's poor. The multidimensional nature of poverty also highlighted the importance of the international community's support for the eradication of extreme poverty and the stability of international financial markets and global governance.

17. Mexico had made progress in social inclusion and gender equality, having made efforts to expand its social protection network, give women more opportunities to participate in education, politics and employment, and increase opportunities for economic inclusion and productivity. The promotion of gender equality, in particular in the labour market, encouraged productive and social inclusion, which contributed to sustainable economic growth. The case of Mexico proved that gender equality fostered greater participation by society in growth and development, and thereby increased national empowerment, which was essential to achieving the MDGs.

18. The promotion of inclusive financing, through easier access to credit, investment in human capital,

and infrastructure development, were contributing to sustainable economic development. Her delegation was confident that Mexico would build on its progress regarding the MDGs to implement the sustainable development goals. It encouraged Mexico to strengthen its public policies for social adaptation and the prevention of biodiversity loss.

19. If sustainable development was to be achieved, production and consumption must generate less contamination and waste. In that connection, she requested further information on the main lessons learned by Mexico and on the challenges in its transition to sustainable production and consumption patterns. Her Government supported Mexico's efforts to close structural gaps in order to achieve equality, social inclusion and the eradication of poverty, which were essential to sustainable development.

*Georgia (E/2014/72)*

20. **Mr. Imnadze** (Georgia), speaking on behalf of Ms. Irma Kavfaradze, Deputy Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development, Georgia, said that his country had made considerable progress on Goals 1, 2, 3, 7 and 8 of the MDGs. It had halved the number of people living in extreme poverty, although the number of children living in poverty remained high, as did the unemployment rate. Primary school enrolment had been virtually universal since 2000, with good gender parity indices at all levels, although girls from ethnic minorities remained at greater risk of dropping out of school. Since the 2010 adoption of a gender equality law and the establishment of a Parliamentary Council on Gender Equality, the percentage of women in Parliament had broken the 10 per cent threshold, and women were increasingly represented in ministerial posts. The ratio of women to men working in the business sector had also improved, although they remained underrepresented at decision-making levels and their salaries were still only 60 per cent of men's. Georgia had also made progress in expanding access to safe drinking water, although there continued to be discrepancies between urban and rural areas. Action plans had been developed to increase effective implementation of the global conventions relating to climate change. Georgia had also signed a number of free trade agreements and had virtually no non-tariff barriers.

21. Less progress had been made on Goals 4, 5 and 6. In particular, Georgia continued to have the second

highest child mortality rate in Europe. It was taking steps to expand vaccine coverage, especially in rural areas. It had more than halved its maternal mortality rate, increased the proportion of births attended by skilled medical personnel, and expanded provision of family planning services. Georgia had been one of the first countries in its region to achieve universal access to antiretroviral treatment for HIV/AIDS, and it was in the process of obtaining certification as a malaria-free country from the World Health Organization. Regrettably, it was still among the 27 countries with the highest burden of multi-drug resistant tuberculosis.

22. Political commitment had been an important factor in his country's successes. National development plans had prioritized improvements in maternal health and disease eradication, and Government entities had been established to coordinate efforts in those areas. A second factor had been resource investment, both domestic and foreign. His Government had channelled significant funding into achieving the MDGs, but international partners remained indispensable, particularly when it came to recently developed vaccines and medicines, which tended to be expensive. Thirdly, investment in data quality had contributed to the progress made. His Government had mobilized resources for a maternal and child health management information system that was capable of transforming raw data into useful information. A fourth factor had been the promotion of evidence-based care. Based on research findings, a national clinical protocol on caesarean sections had been developed in 2013, and an evidence-based approach to HIV/AIDS had made Georgia a model for prevention and treatment. Nevertheless, a number of challenges remained, including late diagnosis of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, and the social stigma attached to both of those diseases.

23. His country's experiences showed that positive results were achieved in areas where national coordinating councils were employed alongside relevant inter-agency coordination mechanisms working with donor organizations and United Nations agencies. The international community should therefore continue to provide assistance to low-income and middle-income countries. The engagement of civil society partners, in particular academia and the media, had also played a critical role in consensus-building and coordinated action.

24. Universal health care should be more strongly positioned in the post-2015 development agenda. There was a particular need for affordable and effective antiviral treatment for hepatitis C, which was a major burden for middle-income countries like his own.

25. **Ms. Jurevičienė** (Observer for Lithuania), reviewer, said that prior to joining the European Union, her country had gone through institutional, economic and social reforms similar to those being undertaken by Georgia. She asked what measures the Government of Georgia planned to take for the 2014-2020 cycle to combat poverty and unemployment, and stressed that further progress should be made to ensure the economic empowerment of women and their representation at decision-making levels. The significant differences in child mortality rates between urban and rural areas were a matter of concern, and she wondered what measures were planned to remedy that situation, particularly with respect to coordination between local and central authorities. It would also be helpful to know how the Government planned to maintain its impressive achievements in disease eradication after the grant from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria ended in 2016.

26. **Mr. Spinellis** (Greece), reviewer, said that his country worked closely with Georgia on matters of health. He wondered what future policies and plans were in place to reduce child mortality. He also requested further information on the methodology employed to eliminate malaria and the measures taken to improve the quality of life of persons living with HIV.

27. **Mr. Mohieldin** (Corporate Secretary and President's Special Envoy on the Millennium Development Goals, the Post-2015 Process and Financial Development, World Bank), moderator, said that the presentations had offered useful lessons for planning the post-2015 development agenda. He wondered to what extent the MDGs were responsible for the successes of national policies. With just over 500 days remaining until the target date for achievement of the MDGs, it would be useful to take stock of both the lessons that could be learned from successes and the concerns arising from unfinished business. He wanted to hear more about the mechanisms by which political commitment had been translated into action in all three of the presenting countries, and also the role of technocrats in coordination and monitoring. He wondered if more

discussion on financing issues, and also on the quality of data, might be useful. The original MDGs had focused on such indicators as enrolment in educational establishments and access to health care, but other measurement approaches taking into account the quality as well as the quantity of services could also be used. He asked the presenters to provide more information on the impact of growth on both income and gender inequality and encouraged further discussion on the role of regional and international partnerships.

28. **Mr. Phuangketkeow** (Observer for Thailand) said that even before the adoption of the MDGs his Government's approach to development had been people-centred, drawing on the philosophy of the sufficiency economy, which, applied at both the individual and the national levels, was based on moderation, reasonableness, resilience to risks, living in harmony with the environment and recognition of one's strengths and weaknesses.

29. The international community should focus on the means of implementation of the MDGs, in particular the mobilization of financial resources. For that reason, it was vital to strengthen global and regional partnerships in order to ensure MDG implementation at the national level.

30. He agreed that Thailand should make more progress in child and maternal health. Its quantitative successes in achieving the MDGs should be matched by qualitative progress in addressing inequality and improving equity and accessibility, in particular for vulnerable and marginalized populations. Better indicators were needed to measure whether the benefits of the MDGs were trickling down to such groups.

31. With regard to partnerships, Thailand was increasingly engaged in robust bilateral and trilateral development cooperation with Japan, the United States and many other countries in the areas of public health and agriculture. However, the mobilization of resources also required the involvement of the private sector and the establishment of multi-stakeholder partnerships.

32. As for the question on human security posed by the representative of Japan, while no consensus had been reached regarding the definition of that concept, his Government viewed it in the context of its people-centred approach to development. Thailand's heavy investment in universal health coverage had been

worthwhile because such coverage helped to eradicate poverty by reducing the proportion of people's income spent on health care. It also gave individuals a sense of security and prevented outbreaks of disease, thereby strengthening the economy.

33. On the topic of good governance, recent political changes in Thailand did not mean that his Government was retreating from democracy. It would use the events of 22 May 2014 as an opportunity to strengthen its democratic institutions and return to full democracy as soon as possible.

34. **Mr. Lastiri Quirós** (Observer for Mexico), said that his Government was taking steps to curb biodiversity loss and protect the environment. In preparation for the post-2015 development agenda, it had established new institutional and constitutional frameworks. The various political parties wished to establish a national agenda incorporating priorities based on the MDGs and, together with the federal executive, had introduced reforms in Congress to ensure social and economic inclusion and reduce inequality. Energy reform had encouraged investment and generated jobs, while the State remained the owner of Mexico's hydrocarbon reserves. Telecommunications reform would save Mexicans money and increase competition. Secondary reforms in telecommunications and economic competition were under discussion to make Mexico more attractive to investors and introduce clear rules on competition among political actors.

35. Financial reform would make cheaper credit available, enable the financial integration of families and provide banking services to millions. The reform of education would complement the extension of educational coverage by improving education quality. Tax reform would make the system fairer, with sound finances that facilitated the establishment of transfer instruments. A major programme under which economic transfers were provided to 6.5 million families would in future, with World Bank support, provide additional opportunities for beneficiaries to enter the productive economy, so as to break the cycle of poverty and achieve social mobility. Social security reforms would enable a transition to universal social security. Governance would be strengthened through the political and electoral reforms designed to consolidate democracy, and through transparency reform. The changes would generate more inclusive economic growth, jobs and economic competitiveness,

allow the country to make the best use of its resources and enhance social justice.

36. **Mr. Imnadze** (Georgia) said that his Government would further reduce extreme poverty through the Social and Economic Development Strategy, Georgia 2020, which would ensure inclusive growth and the rational use of resources. To address youth unemployment, the Strategy focused on providing higher-level vocational education and improving general education, thereby increasing the number of skilled workers and strengthening the labour market, which would also be enhanced through legal regulations and the reduction of tariffs and other trade barriers. Economic growth was directly linked to the strengthening of social welfare and the achievement of the MDGs.

37. Although child mortality remained high, it was much lower than in the past. In cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United States Agency for International Development, the Maternal and Child Health Coordinating Council of the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs was collecting data for analysis and promoting the regionalization of care. Because child mortality was highest in rural areas, his Government was focusing on the functional integration of levels of care and improvements to regional obstetric and neonatal care. It had established an accreditation commission and programme to ensure that prenatal care was of the required quality.

38. To improve the lives of people living with malaria and HIV/AIDS, his Government had cooperated with the World Health Organization and other United Nations bodies, in particular UNICEF, and with civil society. It had made use of international assistance, because essential drugs must remain affordable if progress was to be maintained.

39. His Government's work on partnerships was directly linked to funding, which was essential to achieving sustainable results. The help of international actors was often needed in the identification of priorities, but once priorities were set the best development drivers were those on the ground. Accountability for the disbursement of funds was the responsibility of both local leadership and the partners themselves.

40. The end of donor aid in 2016 would be a burden on his Government, which had started allocating funds

to address the situation. A review of the progress achieved and the implementation of the lessons learned would be useful not only for Georgia but for other countries.

41. **Ms. Tollmann** (Germany) said that, in view of the lack of extensive consultation before the establishment of the MDGs, she would like to know whether the Goals had fitted in with existing national priorities or had diverted resources from other areas by requiring major structural changes which were difficult to reverse, such as the provision of universal health care.

42. **Mr. Larsen** (Observer for Norway) said that good governance was a matter not only of democratic participation, the rule of law and respect for human rights but also of sound economic governance for a successful market economy, growth and investments. He requested further information from the presenters regarding the extent to which good democratic and economic governance had been both a prerequisite for their countries' progress in achieving the MDGs and a goal in itself.

43. **Mr. Imnadze** (Georgia) said that the MDGs had been helpful in formulating his Government's policy, but they could not take into account the priorities of every country. Good governance was essential to inclusive, sustainable and social economic growth leading to well-being for all and the proper use of resources and assistance funding.

44. **Mr. Lastiri Quirós** (Observer for Mexico) said that the MDGs had helped his Government to formulate and implement commitments such as its national development plan, which included indicators allowing progress to be monitored. They had therefore given his Government clarity in its actions and policies. With regard to good governance, growth depended on strong institutions, the rule of law, transparency, accountability, respect for human rights and social and economic inclusion.

45. **Mr. Phuangketkeow** (Observer for Thailand) said that his Government had always followed a people-centred development approach consistent with the MDGs. The Goals had helped in the setting of national priorities but countries needed the flexibility to implement those priorities in accordance with specific national circumstances. Good governance was essential to economic development, and accountability

and transparency were essential to the implementation of the MDGs.

46. **Mr. Mohieldin** (Corporate Secretary and President's Special Envoy on the Millennium Development Goals, the Post-2015 Process and Financial Development, World Bank), moderator, said that the achievement of the MDGs was facilitated by sustained, inclusive economic growth, effective institutions which fostered stability and good policies which enhanced inclusion, reduced inequality and poverty and improved education and health care. Investment in data, financing through partnerships and high-quality implementation were needed to ensure the success of the post-2015 goals.

*The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.*