



STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR STAFFORD NEIL, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF JAMAICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND CHAIRMAN OF THE GROUP OF 77, ON THE REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (New York, 25 October 2005)

Mr. President,

The Group of 77 and China joins in expressing solidarity with the people of Pakistan and other South-Asian countries which have suffered from the recent devastating earthquake. We emphasise that the needs are enormous and urgent and should receive substantial support from the international community.

On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, I wish to make general comments on the Report of the Economic and Social Council for 2005. We examine the Report against the background of what has been a very eventful year in the Council. We especially want to recognize the dynamic leadership of the President of the Council, Ambassador Munir Akram and his Bureau in guiding the work of the Council in 2005. His leadership brought an innovative spirit and invigorated the work of the Council during the year.

An Assessment of the Work of the Council

Mr. President,

This year has been a significant year for the ECOSOC. Many of the activities undertaken were geared towards providing the necessary inputs for the High-Level Plenary Meeting held in September. Almost all the discussions in the Council had as the central theme the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. From the outset, therefore, there was a conscious attempt to bring focused discussions to the many critical issues of import to the wider international community. I will draw attention to aspects of the Council's work which were of particular importance to the G77 and China.

First, the annual Spring Meeting of the ECOSOC with the Bretton Woods Institutions, the World Trade Organisation and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. We see great value in the opportunity to engage these institutions whose policies have a direct impact on development. It is for this reason that we should think of ways to expand the scope of the deliberations beyond the current format. The Council must be better able to facilitate networking in the development system and to provide greater oversight in global economic decision-making. We should think of ways to strengthen the outcome of the dialogue and to expand the discussions beyond the current timeframe that it is currently allotted.

Mr. President,

The other important aspect of the work of the Council to which I would like to refer is its substantive session held in June-July. We are disappointed that the only outcome for the High-Level Segment this year is a mere summary of the deliberations. We recognize the difficulties involved but we would have wanted a more substantive recognition of the many useful ideas and proposals which were discussed over the three-day period. There were, for example, very constructive ideas on current trends and developments in the world economy on the eradication of hunger and poverty as well as on employment creation. Unfortunately, none of these could be reflected in a consensus document for adoption by our Ministers. We hope that this situation will not be repeated in the future. We must all work together to strengthen the Council and a simple indication of our willingness to do so, should be our ability to ensure that the outcome of the High-level segment is more than a mere summary of the discussions that have taken place. It must fully capture and reflect our unswerving commitment to implement the obligations which we are called to fulfill.

The humanitarian affairs segment continues to merit special attention in order to address humanitarian emergencies, including natural disasters. The devastation wrought on both developed and developing countries as a result of natural disasters is a significant feature of the current year. For developing countries, the magnitude of the destruction is even more dramatic with significant loss of life and damage to property. The recent earthquake in South Asia and the continued ravages of hurricanes and tropical storms in the Caribbean and Central America demonstrate the urgency with which action has to be taken. Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 16 December 1991, has to be given the utmost priority in the work of the Council, with due regard to the primary role of the affected state in the organization and delivery of humanitarian assistance. These disasters demonstrate the need to strengthen system-wide

coherence and to urgently implement the worldwide early warning system which was called for in the 2005 Hyogo Declaration and the Hyogo Framework for Action. Greater attention also needs to be given to establishing predictable funding, especially for neglected emergencies and to reduce the gap in terms of resource needs for emergency assistance and for aid to development.

I turn briefly to the General Segment. As customary, this segment commanded the most attention in terms of time and energy given the volume of work to be covered throughout its duration. It represents an important arena through which a myriad of issues, particularly those related to the work of the functional commissions, can be considered. The real value of the general segment was sometimes lost in the attempt to ensure that the many agenda items to be addressed under the segment were completed within the stipulated time-frame. As we contemplate how best to adapt the working methods of the Council to the needs of the present global environment, special consideration will have to be given to how best to use the general segment to provide better coordination and oversight of the subsidiary bodies of the Council.

One issue which we hoped could have been reflected in this year's Report of the Council concerns the situation in the Maldives. We are close to the first year anniversary of the earthquake and tsunami which wreaked havoc in the Indian Ocean and littoral states. Yet, the Council has not been able to take a decision to support the request of the Government of the Maldives for a delay in its transition from LDC status, requested as a result of the devastation to that country arising from the tsunami. The Group of 77 and China will continue to seek an early decision on this matter.

The Future of the Council

Mr. President,

The High-level Plenary Meeting agreed on the areas in which the role of the ECOSOC should be strengthened. We are now charged with identifying the most appropriate modalities to ensure that its role in the areas of competence can be strengthened.

We are particularly interested in proposals to make the Council more integrally involved in policy dialogue and implementation as well as in the promotion of development cooperation. They provide an important basis on which we can begin to expand the Council's system-wide coordination for development cooperation, as currently carried out under the operational activities segment, and to better advance the implementation of the development agenda through strengthening the link between the normative and operational aspects.

At this juncture, I would like to highlight three important issues which should guide any future work of the Council.

First, preserving the intergovernmental process. We have long maintained that the Council should be given a more prominent role in advancing social and economic development. We acknowledge that civil society has an important contribution to make in this process and while we encourage such efforts, we urge that it not compromise the primary role of member states in the overall process.

Second, as we move towards better integration and coordination of the implementation of the outcomes emanating from major UN conferences and summits, we must be mindful of preserving the integrity of each of the respective processes. This is critical in advancing the implementation of commitments.

Third, the organization of the work of the Council should allow for greater flexibility and enable the Council to consider and take action on development issues as they arise. Thematic discussions on policy issues, analysis of trends in the global economy and reaction to emergencies should be possible within a more flexible Work Programme of the Council.

Mr. President,

The Group of 77 and China stands ready to lend its full support to future discussions aimed at elaborating the new functions assigned to the ECOSOC. We understand that additional information will be provided next month detailing the financial implications of these new undertakings. It is our hope that we will not allow the issue of financing to deter us from taking much needed action in strengthening the Council. We expect that equal attention will be given to all aspects of the system as we move towards the reform and revitalization of the entire United Nations.

Thank you.

