

**Informal Panel Discussion on the Reform of
the Economic and Social Council
7 May, 2004**

**Opening statement by H.E. Ms. Marjatta Rasi, Permanent Representative of
Finland and President of the Economic and Social Council**

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you today to this informal ECOSOC panel discussion. Today we will discuss “Reform of the United Nations ECOSOC”, a topic that is of interest to us all. Over the years, the Council has undergone changes by engaging itself in emerging issues. In fact, the panel discussion we are convening today is yet another example of the Council’s continued efforts to improve its work.

The Council launched, in 1995, an integrated approach to conference follow-up and has pursued the cross-cutting themes emerging from conferences at the high-level and coordination segments of its annual substantive sessions since then. The Council has also guided the work of its functional commissions within the framework of an integrated approach to conference follow-up. Close linkages with the UN funds and programmes should be maintained in the various dimensions of the Council's work.

Furthermore, the General Assembly resolution 57/270B has mandates the Council to use the conference follow-up as a framework for planning, monitoring and assessing the activities of the UN. In 2005, the ECOSOC is expected to receive the outcome of a review by its functional commissions of their working methods, with the objective of maximizing their impact on the implementation of conference goals. The Council convenes on an annual basis a meeting of the chairpersons of all of the functional commissions during the general segment of the substantive session each July. The Council Bureau also has regular meetings with the bureaux of its functional commissions.

By selecting cutting-edge issues as themes for its high-level segment, the Council has taken a lead role in key policy areas in recent years, including adopting Ministerial Declarations providing policy guidance and recommendations for action on: development and international cooperation: the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based global economy (2000); the role of the UN system in supporting the efforts of African countries to achieve sustainable development (2001); the contribution of human resources development, including in the areas of health and education, to the process of development (2002); and promoting an integrated approach to rural development in developing countries for poverty eradication and sustainable development (2003). This year, the high-level segment of the Council, to be held from 28-30 June in New York, will address: resources mobilization and enabling environment for poverty eradication in the context of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010. The Council has launched concrete actions and innovative mechanisms as a result of its deliberations, such as the establishment of UNAIDS in 1997 and the UN ICT Task Force in 2000.

Another new area of work for ECOSOC during these last two years has been the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on African countries emerging from conflict – mechanism, which was established in 2002. ECOSOC has established two country specific Groups, one on Guinea-Bissau and one on Burundi. The mandate of these Groups is to examine existing programmes, provide advice on their effectiveness, as well as to make recommendations for a long-term programme of support based on comprehensive approach to peace and stability.

The Council emphasizes the important role that the civil society, the NGOs and the business can play in development, particularly through bringing together - in an unprecedented way - major stakeholders to respond to international priorities expressed in the Millennium Declaration, World Summit on Sustainable Development, the International Conference on Financing for Development and the Millennium Development Goals.- together with the whole UN.

I also welcome the increased cooperation between ECOSOC and the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, the UNCTAD and other U.N. bodies working in economic and social development. The annual special high-level meeting of ECOSOC has developed into a strategic platform where collective actions in support of the Monterrey Consensus and the MDGs are discussed.

Today our distinguished panelists, former Presidents of ECOSOC and other distinguished personalities who have deep knowledge and understanding of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations, will share with us their vision on the role of ECOSOC and how to make it more relevant in today's world.

I am particularly pleased that two of my predecessors who have lead efforts for ECOSOC reform in previous years, His Excellency Mr. Gert Rosenthal and Professor Ivan Šimonovic, have been able to join us at this occasion. I also warmly welcome Mr. Jonathan Moore from Harvard University, whom I have invited to give us a broader overview of some of the current economic and social challenges we are facing today. I am also delighted that Professor Edward Luck from Columbia University, Ms. Nafis Sadik, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for HIV/AIDS in Asia and the Pacific and member of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change; and Mr. James O.C. Jonah, Senior Fellow of the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies and former Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, have been able to join us today and I look forward to their informative presentations. I would encourage our distinguished panelists to limit their remarks to 8 minutes each to allow for sufficient time for an informal and open discussion with the Council members.

Without further ado, it is my pleasure now to give the floor to Mr. José Antonio Ocampo, Under-Secretary-General, who will moderate this panel discussion.

You have the floor, Sir.