

# Introduction

By H.E. Mr. Lazarous Kapambwe, President of the Economic and Social Council, United Nations



UN Photo, Jean-Marc Ferré

Each year the Economic and Social Council's Annual Substantive Session offers policymakers many fine opportunities. It provides a natural setting at which to explore the numerous development and humanitarian challenges confronting us. It also allows for a major review of United Nations' operations—a chance to scale-up what works, as well as chart a new course where needed.

This time around in Geneva, the session brought together a veritable smorgasbord of key players: ministers of education, foreign affairs, development cooperation and planning, along with heads of various UN entities, NGOs, top corporations, foundations and other major development stakeholders.

I believe it is fair to say that we can report very positive results. During the High-Level Segment—which attracted distinguished and high-level personalities, such as former UK Prime Minister Brown—the Council set out, for instance, precisely why education is so vital to progress on health, poverty and the other millennium development goals. “National Voluntary Presentations”, a recent ECOSOC innovation, allowed twelve countries to share their development experiences in enviable depth. The Council's Annual Ministerial Declaration rounded off the segment with important policy advice to the entire UN system—together with a comprehensive follow-up scheduled for next year's Coordination Segment.

This year's Coordination Segment, meanwhile, focused on ways to speed-up the effectiveness of UN WOMEN, the new UN organization charged with promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. On this, more action on “cross-cutting issues and defined new modalities for gender mainstreaming” was urged by all. Following up further on the powerful spirit of review so closely associated with ECOSOC, the Council also “gave clear directions on the focus of the comprehensive policy review of the United Nations system operational activities” at its Operational Activities Segment (to be carried out, likewise, by the General Assembly in 2012).

Improving our organizational speed and flexibility, especially when assisting the world's most vulnerable nations, was another major topic of discussion. Also decided was the

agenda for the 2015 Annual Ministerial Review and Development Cooperation Forum, which will now include a review of the implementation of the “Istanbul Programme of Action” in the post-2015 development landscape.

On the humanitarian front, the gathering was timely reminded that crises demand not only strong financial partnerships to keep resources flowing, but also fast and nimble response capabilities. Other topics on the agenda included the ongoing food crisis in the Horn of Africa, the worsening conflict in Somalia, nation-building in South Sudan and reconstruction in Haiti (discussion of which was buttressed by the lengthy recommendations of the UN’s Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti report).

Also noteworthy was the creation of a new United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management, which will bring together (for the first time globally) experts from all Member States to compile and disseminate best practices on geospatial information.

Good developments, all of them. But now what is next? How will this 2011 Substantive Session be perceived in years to come?

Much will surely depend on the soundness of the many resolutions and policy recommendations issued. Yet still more will depend, I firmly believe, on the world’s collective commitment—to stay on track, to dodge the many new hurdles which will invariably come our way, and, out of these, to emerge stronger than ever.

If this publication can play a small role towards this end, it will have more than served its purpose.



H.E. Mr. LAZAROUS KAPAMBWE  
President  
Economic and Social Council, United Nations