Istanbul Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries, Subsidiary Body Elections Focus as Economic and Social Council Opens Coordination Session

April 5, 2016

ECOSOC Meetings Coverage

http://www.un.org/press/en/2016/ecosoc6748.doc.htm

Launching a series of coordination and management meetings for its 2016 session, the Economic and Social Council today took stock of current strategies and identified new ways in which the United Nations and its partners could better coordinate efforts to support the world’s least developed countries and ensure no nation or person was left behind in global development.

The meeting aimed to substantially contribute to the upcoming high-level midterm review, to be held from 27 to 29 May in Antalya, Turkey, on progress in implementing the 2011-2020 Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries.

Opening the dialogue, Heidi Schroderus-Fox, Director of the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, who served as the moderator, said the review was taking place at a critical time, following the adoption of several landmark agreements in 2015.  She said the outcome report on the midterm review would be presented at the Council’s next coordination and management meetings in June.

Taffere Tesfachew, Director of the Division for Africa, Least Developed Countries and Special Programmes of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), said the review should focus on lessons that could be drawn from the recent trade performance of least developed countries and steps those nations should take to capitalize on duty-free and quota-free market access opportunities in order to double their share of global exports by 2020, as called for by the Istanbul Programme of Action and Sustainable Development Goal 17.

As the drop in commodity prices would slow the least developed countries’ steady export growth over the past decade, the issue of export diversification must return to the forefront of their development agenda, he said.  Least developed countries needed more support to build production capacity and reduce the cost of trade.  In addition, the assumption in the Istanbul Programme of Action that trade-driven growth would automatically generate concrete benefits in social development needed a rethink as data in the past 25 years showed poverty reduction was not as expected in least developed countries in Africa.  The review should also call for urgent implementation of the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) ministerial decision on preferential rules of origin for those nations.

Robert Chase, Senior Adviser to the Director of Operations Risk, Operations Policy and Country Services at the World Bank, said the 48 least developed countries were the institution’s core clients.  They accounted for 12 per cent of the world’s population but only 2 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP); all faced capacity and institutional constraints and grappled with global challenges such as climate change, alarming health pandemics, slowed growth and rising inequality.  Development interventions in such countries were high risk but also high return.

The International Development Association, a World Bank lending arm offering credits and grants for programmes that boost economic growth, reduce inequalities, and improve people’s living conditions, had provided $22 billion for fragile and conflict-affected countries since 2000, and dedicated 40 per cent of its overall resources to least developed countries from 2010 to 2013, he said.  In 2015, the Bank pledged to provide direct support to help such nations improve tax systems and increase transparency as a way to eliminate safe havens for illicit financial flows, a move which could provide more resources than direct financial assistance.  The Bank was working with the United Nations system to coordinate the Association’s infrastructure.

It was also working to strengthen public-private partnerships, he said, pointing to the Bank’s advisory services for construction of a 19-kilometre rapid transit system in Dakar aimed at accommodating rapid growth and urban planning challenges in the Senegalese capital.  He also cited partnerships for a road expansion project in Lao People’s Democratic Republic and a $3.1 billion scheme to sustainably develop the Niger River basin of Nigeria.  Despite such successes, much had to be done to support the least developed countries, he said, stressing that:  “No one should live in conditions of abysmal and extreme poverty.”

Babatunde Omilola, Head of Development Planning and Inclusive Sustainable Growth Team of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), said UNDP was helping to mainstream the Istanbul Programme of Action into national development strategies and the work of United Nations funds, programmes and agencies.  From 2008 to 2012, half of UNDP’s resources went to help least developed countries in areas such as democratic governance, the environment and graduation from least developed country status.  The Programme provided analytic studies, policy direction and advice on how to better coordinate and engage development partners and carry out impact assessments.

Since 2012, UNDP country offices had supported Bhutan, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Nepal and Bangladesh upon their graduation from least developed country status, advising them on ways to create medium-term development plans, build capacity and facilitate South-South exchanges, he said, noting that sustainable development focused on trade and productive capacities, and that green growth was vital.  UNDP had placed a strong emphasis on inclusive growth, he said, citing examples in Africa, where the Programme had provided $100 million annually through the United Nations Capital Development Fund to enhance the private sector’s contribution to trade, growth and poverty reduction.  In Uganda, more than $2.6 million had been provided for an agricultural development strategy to connect producers to markets.  Since 2012, UNDP had supported 12 least developed countries in the extractive industries.

Aynul Hasan, Director of Macroeconomic Policy and Development Division, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), speaking via video link, said the number of least developed countries in the region had decreased from 14 in the 1990s to 12, seven of which were close to graduation.  Their economic growth rate had dropped; nevertheless, the countries were performing reasonably well.  In early 2000, ESCAP helped the Maldives to develop a six-year plan that enabled the island nation to graduate from least developed country status.  Last year, UNDP and ESCAP extended a partnership launched in 2001 to help Maldives achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

She said that the ESCAP report on the least developed countries, to be released in May, would focus on their ability to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, using network analysis to help them towards that end.  China, India and other developed States had advised the least developed countries on how to integrate the post-2015 development agenda into their planning processes.  ESCAP was partnering with regional development banks to help those nations with tax cooperation, infrastructure financing, inclusive financing and capital market matters.

Taufiqur Rahman, Head of the Least Developed Countries Unit, WTO, also speaking via video link, said WTO supported least developed States through negotiations, technical support and capacity-building, earmarking more than 40 per cent of its technical aid to those nations.  A programme kept the Istanbul Programme of Action under review and allowed WTO members to offer preferences to services and suppliers from least developed countries.  In 2012, the guidelines for those States to accede to the WTO were streamlined; since then four such countries — Vanuatu, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Yemen and Samoa had graduated from least developed status and had joined the global trade body.  Meanwhile, Afghanistan and Liberia had completed the accession process, bringing to 36 the number of least developed States with WTO membership.

In 2013, during the Bali Ministerial Conference, the first-ever multilateral guidelines on rules of origin were issued, making it easier for least developed countries to qualify for preferential market access, he said.  The Bali Package also granted duty-free and quota-free market access to some services.  Least developed countries had been granted a 17-year transition period, until 2033, to comply with Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), which was particularly important with regard to pharmaceutical provisions.

In the last few years, WTO had delivered important outcomes, eliminating agricultural export subsidies, a long-standing demand for least developed countries which enabled them to better compete on world agricultural markets, he said.  Yet, challenges remained to further integrate those nations into world trade, he stressed, echoing the concerns of Mr. Tesfachew that the steep decline in commodity prices in the last few years had hindered the least developed countries’ share in world commodity and commercial exports.

When the floor was opened to delegations, the representative of Bangladesh said the least developed countries must be granted the preferential trade treatment they deserved, regretting that the long-promised duty-free and quota-free market access had yet to materialize.  Meaningful market access was of key importance.  At 2 or 3 per cent, the least developed countries had poor representation in decision-making in the World Bank Group, and that must change, as must tax collection policies.  He asked the WTO for more tangible support for accession to the global body.

Turkey’s representative stressed the importance of timely implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action, particularly following adoption of the post-2015 development agenda.  He strongly encouraged participation in next month’s midterm review in Antalya.

The representative of the United States asked how United Nations partners could keep the development agenda focused on least developed countries and integrate support for them related to trade and capacity-building at the national level, while China’s representative called for stronger coordination among them.

In response, Mr. Rahman said WTO’s focus was on least developed countries and would remain so in the foreseeable future.  WTO members had given them special attention, including through his Unit.  Mr. Hassan added that ESCAP had a dedicated unit for States with special needs, including the least developed countries, and it had an intergovernmental body platform.  The next ESCAP report would focus on how to adapt the Sustainable Development Goals in the national plans of least developed countries.

Mr. Omilola said that from 2006 to 2012 half the global resources of UNDP were dedicated to least developed countries and the Programme aimed to increase that figure to 75 per cent.  UNDP was working with myriad United Nations agencies to harmonize their agendas and integrate poverty eradication and environmental conservation.  He noted coordination among them in capacity-building, South-South exchanges and in helping graduation from least developed country status.

Mr. Chase said the World Bank conducted a systematic diagnostic for each individual country to devise a suitable framework for a partnership with the country.  It was essential to have country-driven approaches and problem-solving solutions around which United Nations agencies could organize.  The financial institution was in the process of replenishing its funding for its International Development Association, which would enable it to remain focused on least developed countries.  Regarding the role of least developed countries in decision-making, he said the Bank was undergoing reform of a dynamic formula to address items such as systematic resilience and climate change.

Mr. Tesfachew said that Lao People’s Democratic Republic was the only least developed country that had achieved all eight Millennium Development Goals by 2015 and that, with that in mind, UNCTAD was focusing on those countries to ensure they fared better with the Sustainable Development Goals.  The agency reported annually to the Secretariat on its support for the least developed countries.  Yet, coordination with other agencies was not easy as they could have conflicting points of view and advice for least developed countries.  When processes were country-driven and resources were given with conditions, coordination tended to occur.

At the beginning of the meeting, the Council adopted without a vote four draft decisions contained in the report of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations (document E/2016/32 (Part I)) on its 2016 regular session, held from 25 January-3 February and 16 February.  The drafts called for Council action.

By the terms of draft decision I, the Council, among other things, granted consultative status to 206 non-governmental organizations, closed without prejudice consideration of the request for consultative status by 23 such organizations after they had failed to respond to queries over the course of two consecutive Committee sessions, and decided to close the application for such status submitted by Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation.

By the other three drafts, the Council took note of the withdrawal of the consultative status requested by one non-governmental organization, decided to reinstate the status of one such organization that had submitted its outstanding quadrennial report, and it took note of the Committee’s report.

After that action, the United States representative took the floor, expressing alarm at the increasing trend of limiting civil society’s participation in the United Nations system, including by blocking the applications of non-governmental organizations and silencing them.  In the past three years, more than 50 countries had enacted measures to restrict civil society and in 2016, for the first time, the Committee denied a non-governmental organization the ability to speak before its application was considered.  Governments could only achieve the best outcomes with the help and engagement of civil society partners, who were part of the daily fibre in her country.  All civil society representatives should be allowed to express their views and the United Nations should strive to accredit as many non-governmental organizations as possible.

The Council also decided to postpone its special meeting on international cooperation in tax matters to a later date.

Elections

The Council also held elections to fill vacancies in many of its subsidiary bodies.  Members had before them an agenda, containing information on the candidates for each of the vacancies (document [E/2016/1/Add.1](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/2016/1/Add.1)).

International Narcotics Control Board:  In two rounds of secret balloting, the Council elected — among candidates nominated by Governments — Sevil Atasoy (Turkey), David T. Johnson (United States), Galina A. Korchagina (Russian Federation), Luis Alberto Otarola Peñaranda (Peru) and Alejandro Mohar Betancourt (Mexico) to the Board for a five-year term beginning 2 March 2017.  The other candidates were Parviz Afshar (Iran), Chafika Bensaoula (Algeria), Wolfgang Artur Goetz (Germany), Amalia Margarita Laborde García (Uruguay), Ana dos Passos da Conceição Mamede Graça (Angola), Maria Lucia Oliveira de Souza Formigoni (Brazil), Ahmed Kamal El Din Samak (Egypt), Sri Suryawati (Indonesia), Luis Yarzabal (Uruguay) and Fadi Mustafa Yousef Alattiat (Jordan).

In a single round of secret balloting, the Council also elected — among candidates nominated by the World Health Organization (WHO) — Cornelius de Joncheere (Netherlands) and Richard Mattick (Australia) for the same term.  The other candidates were Mohammed Tamouh Abou-Saleh (Syria), Lukas Radbruch (Germany) and Emran Razaghi (Iran).

Statistical Commission:  The Council elected by acclamation six members for four-year terms, beginning 1 January 2017:  Belarus (Eastern European States); Colombia and Mexico (Latin American and Caribbean States); and Germany, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (Western European and other States).  It deferred balloting for two members from Asia-Pacific States to its next meeting.

Commission on Population and Development:  The Council elected by acclamation eight members to four-year terms, beginning at the first meeting of the Commission’s fifty-first session in 2017 and expiring at the close of the Commission’s fifty-fourth session in 2021.  They included Cameroon, Madagascar and Mali (African States); Japan (Asia-Pacific States); Brazil, Cuba and Mexico (Latin American and Caribbean States); and Belgium (Western European and other States).

The Council postponed the election of two members from the Asia-Pacific States, one member from the Eastern European States and three members from the Western European and other States for the same term.

Taking action on an outstanding vacancy, it elected by acclamation Turkmenistan (Asia-Pacific States) for a term beginning on the date of election and expiring at the close of the Commission’s forty-ninth session in 2016.

Commission for Social Development:  The Council elected by acclamation 17 members for a four-year term, beginning at the first meeting of the Commission’s fifty-sixth session in 2017 and expiring at the close of its fifty-ninth session in 2021:  Côte d’Ivoire, Madagascar, Malawi and Sudan (African Group); China and Turkmenistan (Asia-Pacific States); Brazil (Latin American and Caribbean States); and Switzerland (Western European and other States).

It postponed the election of two members from the Asia-Pacific States, two members from the Eastern European States, two members from the Latin American and Caribbean States and three members from the Western European and other States for the same term.

It went on to elect by acclamation the United States (Western European and other States) to fill an outstanding vacancy for a term beginning on the date of election until the close of the Commission’s fifty-eighth session in 2020.

Finally, it postponed the election of two members from the African States for a term expiring at the close of the Commission’s fifty-eighth session, one from the Eastern European States for a term expiring at the close of the fifty-seventh session in 2019, and three from the Western European and other States, including one for a term expiring at the close of the fifty-fifth session in 2017 and two for a term expiring at the close of the fifty-eighth session.

The Chair, Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava (Zimbabwe), appealed to the regional groups concerned to submit candidates for those unfilled seats at the earliest opportunity.

Commission on the Status of Women:  The Council elected by acclamation 11 members to four-year terms, beginning at the first meeting held in 2017 of the Commission’s sixty-second session and expiring at the close of the Commission’s sixty-fifth session in 2021.  They included Namibia, Niger and Tunisia (African States); China and Bahrain (Asia-Pacific States); Estonia (Eastern European States); Chile and Peru (Latin American and Caribbean States); and Canada, Ireland and Israel (Western European and other States).

Commission on Science and Technology for Development:  The Council elected by acclamation 16 members to four-year terms, beginning 1 January 2017:  Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria (African States); Japan, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia and Turkmenistan (Asia-Pacific States); Hungary and Russian Federation (Eastern European States); El Salvador and Brazil (Latin American and Caribbean States); and Austria, Germany, Portugal and Switzerland (Western European and other States).

It postponed the election of one member from the African States, two members from the Latin American and Caribbean States, and one member from the Western European and other States for the same term.

Committee for Programme and Coordination:  The Council nominated seven members for election by the General Assembly for three-year terms beginning on 1 January 2017 and expiring on 31 December 2019:  Egypt, Eritrea and Senegal (African States); China, Bangladesh and Republic of Korea (Asia-Pacific States); and Haiti (Latin American and Caribbean States).

The Chair reminded the Council of two outstanding vacancies on the Committee, both from the Western European and other States group, one for a term expiring on 31 December 2017 and the other for a term expiring on 31 December 2018.  Both terms would begin on the date of election by the General Assembly.

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights:  The Council elected by acclamation Chen Shiqiu (China) and Waleed Sadi (Jordan), from the Asia-Pacific States; Laura-Maria Craciunean (Romania) and Zdzisław Kedzia (Poland), from the Eastern European States; Lydia Carmelita Ravenberg (Suriname), from the Latin American and Caribbean States; and Mikel Mancisidor de la Fuente (Spain) and Michael Windfuhr (Germany), from the Western European and other States, to a four-year term beginning 1 January 2017.  It deferred balloting for two members from the African States to its next meeting.

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues:  The Council elected by acclamation Gervais Nzoa (Cameroon), from the African States; Seyed Mohsen Emadi (Iran), from the Asia-Pacific States; Jesus Guadalupe Fuentes Blanco (Mexico) and Tarcila Rivera Zea (Peru), from the Latin American and Caribbean States; and Jens Dahl (Denmark) and Brian Keane (United States) to a three-year term beginning 1 January 2017.  It deferred balloting for one member from the Eastern European States to its next meeting.

Executive Board of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF):  The Council elected by acclamation 11 members to three-year terms, beginning 1 January 2017:  Angola (African States); China and Saudi Arabia (Asia-Pacific States); Czech Republic and Russian Federation (Eastern European States); Antigua and Barbuda and Guatemala (Latin American and Caribbean States); and Germany, Norway, Spain and United Kingdom (Western European and other States).

With Switzerland resigning from the Executive Board effective 31 December 2016, the Council elected Canada to complete its term, beginning 1 January 2017 and expiring 31 December 2018.  It also elected France and Ireland to complete the terms of Australia and Finland, respectively, beginning 1 January 2017 and expiring 31 December 2018.

Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)/United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS):  It elected by acclamation 11 members to three-year terms, beginning 1 January 2017:  Mauritius (African States); China and Iran (Asia-Pacific States); Albania and Republic of Moldova (Eastern European States); Cuba and Panama (Latin American and Caribbean States); and Germany, Netherlands, Norway and the United States (Western European and other States).

With Spain, Austria, Belgium, Turkey and Canada resigning their seats effective 31 December 2016, the Council elected Australia, Denmark, Finland, New Zealand and the United Kingdom to complete their terms of office — on 31 December 2018, in the case of Australia and Denmark, and a year earlier for the others.

Executive Committee of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women):  The Council, filling 18 vacancies from the regional category in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2010/35, elected by acclamation Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Nigeria, Rwanda and Zambia (African States); Bahrain, China, Japan, Republic of Korea and Yemen (Asia-Pacific States); Belarus and Montenegro (Eastern European States); and Belgium, Denmark and France (Western European and other States) for a three-year term beginning on 1 January 2017 and expiring on 31 December 2019.  It deferred to its next meeting balloting for three seats from the Latin American and Caribbean States.

Executive Board of the World Food Programme:  The Council elected by acclamation three members to three-year terms, beginning 1 January 2017, from States included in the lists contained in the annex to document E/2016/9/Add.10.  They included Sudan from List A; Mexico from List C; and Finland from List D.  In the absence of candidates, the Council postponed the election of one member from List A, one from List B and one from List D for the same term.

Programme Coordinating Board of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS):  The Council elected by acclamation six members to three-year terms, beginning 1 January 2017:  Algeria and Madagascar (African States); India and Indonesia (Asia-Pacific States); Belarus (Eastern European States); Mexico (Latin American and Caribbean States); and the United States (Western European and other States).

It postponed the election of one member from the Western European and other States for the same period.

In addition, the Council elected by acclamation Sweden and Portugal (Western European and other States) to complete the terms of Switzerland and the Netherlands, which were resigning their seats, from 1 January 2017 until 31 December 2018.

Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat):  The Council elected by acclamation seven members to four-year terms, beginning 1 January 2017.  They included Benin, Libya, Madagascar and Somalia (African States); China (Asia-Pacific States); Paraguay (Latin American and Caribbean States); and France (Western European and other States).  It postponed the election of one member from the African States, three members from the Asia-Pacific States, two members from the Latin American and Caribbean States and three members from Western European and other States for the same term.

The Chair reminded the Council of five outstanding vacancies, all from Western European and other States, including two for a term expiring on 31 December 2016, two for a term expiring on 31 December 2018 and one for a term expiring 31 December 2019, all beginning on the date of election.  He went on to appeal to that regional group to submit nominees at the earliest opportunity.

Organizational Committee of the Peacebuilding Commission:  The Council elected by acclamation Belgium for a two-year term beginning on 1 January 2017 and expiring on 31 December 2018.

It postponed the election of one member from the African States, one member from the Asia-Pacific States, one member from the Eastern European States, one member from the Latin American and Caribbean States, and two rotational seats as decided by Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/1, for a two-year term beginning on 1 January 2017.

Intergovernmental Working Group of Experts on International Standards of Accounting and Reporting:  The Council elected by acclamation Kazakhstan and the Philippines (Asia-Pacific States) and Ukraine (Eastern European States) for a term beginning the date of election and expiring on 31 December 2018.  It postponed the election on 21 outstanding vacancies, including four from the African States, one from the Asia-Pacific States, three from the Latin American and Caribbean States and eight from the Western European and other States for terms expiring on 31 December 2017, and two from the Asia-Pacific States, one from the Eastern European States and two from the Latin American States for terms expiring on 31 December 2018, with all terms beginning on the date of election.

Committee for the United Nations Population Award:  The Council elected by acclamation Benin, Gambia and Ghana (African States), Antigua and Barbuda, Haiti and Paraguay (Latin American and Caribbean States); and Israel (Western European and other States) to a term beginning on the date of election and expiring on 31 December 2018.

The Economic and Social Council will meet again at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, 6 April, to continue elections to its subsidiary bodies.