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2007 Organizational Session
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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL APPROVES THEMES FOR 2007

THEMATIC DISCUSSION, ANNUAL MINISTERIAL REVIEW

Focus to Be on Promoting Pro-Poor Economic Growth; Eradicating Poverty, Hunger

Paving the way for its 2007 substantive session, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) this morning adopted several draft decisions nailing down key themes for the discussions at the annual three-week meeting, to be held this year at the United Nations Office in Geneva, from 2 to 27 July.

As proposed by its President Dalius Cekuolis (Lithuania), the Council decided that its 2007 thematic debate would be devoted to “strengthening efforts at all levels to promote pro-poor sustained economic growth, including through equitable macroeconomic policies”; and that the theme for its annual ministerial review would be “strengthening efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger, including through the global partnership for development”.

Prior to that action, President Cekuolis stressed the crucial importance of a successful high-level segment in July setting the stage for a renewed and strengthened Council, urging all delegations to come to a conclusion on the issues as they had a clear and direct impact on the Council’s and the Secretariat’s preparations for the July substantive session.

Following those decisions, the representative of the United States said that today was in many respects a historic day for the Council, which had identified the theme for the first ministerial review. That initiative had significant potential to direct international attention to the best practices and gaps in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Even more significant was the decision to hold a separate thematic discussion emphasizing macroeconomic policies. Based on experience, his country had come to realize that development assistance could not have a positive impact, unless the macroeconomic policy environment in the recipient country was transparent, honest and stable, recognizing market discipline and promoting the private sector.

During the negotiations, he had been concerned that the proposed thematic discussion might prove too controversial or unfocused, he said. He was still concerned that the breadth of the topics could make negotiations on the outcome document difficult. Convinced by the developing countries’ enthusiasm and the President’s argument that ECOSOC could have a serious discussion about the value of macroeconomic policy reform and ways in which to effectively implement it, he hoped the discussion would lead to a convergence of ideas. The theme on the pro-poor growth was also significant, since everybody knew of countries where macro-economic policies were controlled by undemocratic elites for their own benefit. Each country needed macroeconomic policies that were fair and equitable for all the citizens. He was happy to support those themes and looked forward to serious discussion in July.

Pakistan’s representative, on behalf of the “Group of 77” developing countries and China, said he was pleased that the Council had reached a final conclusion on the themes, which marked the culmination of a long process that had started with the World Summit outcome and was part of efforts to strengthen ECOSOC. The Group was happy to see that the discussions would focus on promoting pro-poor sustained economic growth, not just at the national, but also at the international level. The discussion would cover

issues and macroeconomic policies that fell within global remit. The Group looked forward to constructively engaging in the discussion. While the outcome document might be difficult, the end product would be worth the effort.

Germany's representative, on behalf of the European Union, said he had voted in favour of proposals for the theme of the high-level segment as it had been important, following lengthy discussions, to reach a conclusion on the matter. Indeed, there was no more time to lose and the Secretariat needed the chance to start preparations in an orderly manner. It would have been unfortunate if the Council, in the first year that it was supposed to work with a strengthened mandate, had been unable to reach a conclusion on the issues to be discussed at the high-level segment.

The Union had supported the President's proposal, he added, as it was the basis for broad agreement among Member States. The Union did, however, have some concern about the formulation of the theme for the thematic debate, including a lack of clarity and focus. The term, "equitable macroeconomic policy" was vague and ambiguous. It was the Union's view that its emphasis was on the national level, as was the case when macroeconomic policies were discussed in other forums of the United Nations system.

The representative of Canada, also speaking on behalf of Australia and New Zealand (CANZ), said that CANZ had agreed to the themes, because it was important to give the Secretariat what it needed to start preparations in the critical year in ECOSOC's history. The delegations she represented were guided by concern for the effectiveness of the high-level segment, particularly as far as the ministerial review and cooperation forum were concerned. Focused and clear themes held the best prospects to yield results. For the thematic discussion, she shared the concerns of the European Union regarding the vague nature of the wording. As for the macroeconomic policies, the discussion should focus on those policies and their implementation at the national level.

In other action, the Council approved a draft decision on the provisional agenda and documentation for the tenth session of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development as contained in the Commission's report on its ninth session (document E/2006/31). Following that decision, President Cekuolis informed the Council that more time was required to conclude discussions on the remaining issues relating to the Commission.

Responding to the procedural questions posed by the United States representative, the Secretary of the Council provided clarifications regarding preparations for a high-level symposium that the Government of Austria would host in preparation for the Development Cooperation Forum. He explained that the event was outside the regular calendar of conferences and would not be held under the aegis of ECOSOC, with no budget support from the United Nations. In an effort to make the launch of the Development Cooperation Forum a success, the symposium should generate interest and create a sense of involvement and participation.

In that connection, the United States representative said that his concern was about openness. He was interested in preserving the prerogatives of the Council as a collective body and advocated maximum transparency and participation in the preparatory events.

The Secretary said that the host Government was making an effort to invite as many participants as possible to make the symposium representative, within the budgetary constraints.

The Economic and Social Council will reconvene at a time and date to be announced.

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