

11 February 2009



## Press Conference

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

### **PRESS CONFERENCE BY ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL PRESIDENT**

With the international community gearing up for a key United Nations conference to examine fallout of the current economic turbulence on development, the President of the Economic and Social Council today said the 54-member body would use its annual meeting with the Bretton Woods Institutions as a platform to press for more coherence in global financial policy-making.

Briefing reporters at a Headquarters press conference on what she predicted would be a “challenging” year ahead, Sylvie Lucas (Luxembourg) said the Council had decided yesterday that its high-level meeting with the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) will be held on 27 April.

“ECOSOC will have to respond to the current financial crisis,” she said and, ahead of its July 2009 substantive session, the Council planned to use the meeting to mobilize the international community to strengthen macroeconomic and financial policy coherence, coordination and cooperation. Through that discussion, and given its mandate, the Council could make a valuable contribution to the ongoing preparations for the General Assembly’s summit on the financial crisis and its impact on development, now most likely to be held in early June.

She also noted that the meeting would continue to be a principle forum for follow-up on the development financing process launched in 2002 at the Monterrey International Conference on Financing for Development. At the review of that landmark Conference, held in Doha in late November 2008, Member States had acknowledged the need for a strengthened and more inclusive process to carry out that follow-up. The Conference had, therefore, requested the Council to address the issue and formulate recommendations for action by the General Assembly’s sixty-fourth session.

Aside from addressing the challenges posed by the global economic downturn, the Council would in 2009 also press ahead with implementation of the new responsibilities given to it by the General Assembly in 2005, including the Annual Ministerial Review, which would this year be devoted to global public health. The Ministerial Review aims to assess progress made towards the Millennium Development Goals and the implementation of the other goals and targets agreed at major United Nations conferences over the past 15 years.

“We will try to bring out the links between, and challenges [to the] health-related goals and the overall development agenda,” she said, stressing that the Council strongly believed that progress in achieving the Millennium Declaration’s health targets were critical for meeting all the Millennium Goals.

She said the preparatory process for the Ministerial Review was set to get under way tomorrow with a panel discussion on “The Contribution of Traditional Medicine to the Realization of International Development Objectives Related to Global Public Health.” Traditional medicine was a field where the knowledge of developing countries was enormous and where there was a great source of hope for

improving health sectors worldwide. She noted that industrialized countries were increasingly looking to the developed world for guidance in this field.

A related special preparatory event on “Philanthropy and the Global Public Health Agenda” would be held on 23 February and would focus on how the corporate donor community could partner with Governments and other stakeholders in support of the Council’s work, she said. Among the participants would be Princess Christina of Spain, top executives of Novartis Foundation, Pfizer, Becton Dickson and the Business Council for Africa.

Ms. Lucas said that, during the event or at a proposed press conference on that day, the Council expected “some concrete announcements” on contributions that would be made to help accelerate progress in the two top priority areas: improving health outcomes for women and girls; and raising the profile of neglected tropical diseases. With this special event, the Council was aiming to, among other things, expand the range of partners willing to cooperate with the United Nations on important health and development challenges, and increase the flow of philanthropic resources to development-related activities.

She said several other global and regional preparatory meetings and events were planned, including in several of the countries that would present their national voluntary presentations on progress in implementing internationally agreed development goals. That portion of the Review had been “very successful” last year and the participating developing and developed countries for the 2009 session would be Bolivia, China, Jamaica, Japan, Mali, New Zealand, Sri Lanka and the Sudan. Ms. Luca noted that the Council would also continue preparations for its biannual Development Cooperation Forum.

Ms. Lucas was joined at the press conference by Nikhil Seth, Director of the Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination Office of the Department for Economic and Social Affairs. Answering a correspondent’s question, he said that the United Nations had classified a cluster of 17 tropical diseases as “neglected”, which affected more than 1 billion people worldwide. While that number was large, the diseases could be treated relatively inexpensively.

Citing Guinea Worm as one example, he said concentrated awareness-raising and work carried out to combat that disease by the Atlanta-based Carter Center, founded in 1982 by former United States President Jimmy Carter and former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, had had a “significant impact”. Moreover, the World Health Organization (WHO) now estimated that eradication of that disease was imminent. He said that such diseases often got overlooked in the crowded global health agenda and, by casting the spotlight on them, the Council was hoping to amplify the voice of all those affected worldwide.

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