



Remarks by

**His Excellency Oh Joon
President of the Economic and Social Council**

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Members of the ECOSOC Bureau,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is truly a distinct honour for me to assume the Presidency of the Economic and Social Council. I wish to thank all of you for the confidence that you have placed in me.

I would like to pay special tribute to my predecessor Ambassador Martin Sajdik, for his outstanding leadership of the Council during an extended eighteen-month Presidency. It has been a great privilege to have you as our President as you guided us with wisdom and integrity through so many challenges. My hat's off to you with my deepest gratitude and respect, and my best wishes in fulfilling your extremely important new responsibilities.

I would also like to recognize the outstanding contributions and stewardship of my fellow Bureau members, Ambassadors María Emma Mejía Vélez of Colombia, Vladimir Drobnjak of Croatia and Mohamed Khaled Khiari of Tunisia. I dare to say we were really a dream team.

Allow me also to extend my sincere congratulations and a warm welcome to the newly elected Bureau members: Ambassadors Maria Cristina Perceval of Argentina, Mr. Paul Seger of Switzerland, Vladimir Drobnjak of Croatia and Mr. Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava of Zimbabwe. I look forward to working with all of you during this historic time of transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the post-2015 development agenda, with a particular sense of common responsibility and solidarity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me start by sharing with you the story of two towns we can easily locate somewhere in the world today.

In Town A, people get up in the morning and think about how they will get enough food to feed their family. If they have a job, they are worried about keeping it. If they don't, there is not much chance of getting a new one. They still send their children to school even if it burdens the family, because they want their children to have a better life than theirs. When someone is sick in the family, they try to look for any doctors they know, because if they just walk into a hospital, they might have to wait indefinitely to see one, or because they simply cannot afford a doctor, as there is no such thing as health insurance.

In Town B, people get up in the morning and think about whether they should buy a home or invest in the stock market, as the prices of both are going up fast. They are worried about eating too much meat and fat, which cause all kinds of adult diseases. When it comes to education, they want to give their children the best education they can afford either at home or abroad. When someone is sick, they try to find out where the best doctor is, even if it costs beyond what health insurance covers.

I can give you such realistic descriptions of the two towns, as I have lived in both. In fact, my life so far has been divided roughly in half between these two towns. I did not move, but the town transformed itself from A to B.

The transition from Town A to Town B is what is commonly called “development”. Unfortunately, there are still many countries in the world that have yet to experience this transition. But what happened to my country can happen to any other country. I cannot say that people in Town B are necessarily happier than those in Town A. For that matter, we might never understand how we can be happy. Still, the existential imperative we learned from our poverty tells us that it is more difficult to be happy with an empty stomach. It is not easy to be thankful to society when our children are sick and there is not much we can do about it.

That is probably why we all pursue development, despite our differences. And facilitating this pursuit – helping humanity achieve economic and social development in a sustainable environment is what we are doing here in the Council, and at the United Nations.

Distinguished delegates,

In the last eighteen months, ECOSOC has made itself to be better in meeting the opportunities and challenges ahead. There is no doubt that Member States are expecting ECOSOC to lead in the global implementation and review of the post-2015 development agenda. We must rise to the expectation and provide this leadership. As the President of the Council, I have four priorities in the next twelve months.

First, in order to fulfill the new responsibilities of the post-2015 agenda, ECOSOC needs to be more relevant to what is happening in the world. Relevance is the key word. If we, in the ECOSOC, look like continuing the same debate that we have had for decades, it is time for us to look out to see what is happening in the world. ECOSOC needs to consolidate its niche by being more flexible in its agenda and its coverage of issues. We should continue to evolve and adapt as necessary to keep ECOSOC up-to-date to this fast changing world.

The Council has to stand ready to tackle emerging and pressing issues such as inequality. In countries striving to eradicate poverty, inequalities of incomes, opportunity and access to services are closely linked. Yet inequality exists in all countries, developing and developed, and continues to grow. In this connection, I will make it a priority to gain your support for a special meeting of ECOSOC on inequality, in the first quarter of 2016.

Second, the convening of the high-level political forum (HLPF) under the auspices of ECOSOC is a prominent example of the Council’s transformation. The forum will be crucial for promoting, following-up and reviewing the implementation of the new sustainable development goals.

The Council should take advantage of its new linkage with the HLPF to strengthen the coordinating role of ECOSOC, especially in the context of the implementation of the new development agenda and establishment of an effective review and follow-up mechanism.

Third, the Council will continue to strengthen and harmonize the work of the ECOSOC system as a whole. The subsidiary bodies of the Council including functional commissions, regional commissions and expert bodies have much more to contribute to the whole system. We will work closely with each of them.

Aligning the themes and programmes of work of the ECOSOC system with the Council's theme and cycle will be a high priority. So is the need to rationalize the agendas of ECOSOC and its functional commissions

Fourth, the Council will lead the efforts to build an inclusive and engaging global partnership – one that welcomes the significant contribution that all stakeholders can provide – particularly through the Development Cooperation Forum. The DCF is well placed and suited to examine development cooperation in a holistic manner, bringing together all relevant stakeholders.

New partners of development, such as the private sector, civil society and other non-state actors are all assuming important roles in the implementation of the transformative and universal development agenda. As such, multistakeholder partnerships deserve special focus. A renewed global partnership for sustainable development will be the key to mobilizing the necessary means to implement the post-2015 agenda and to create a truly enabling environment.

Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are at the cusp of an important era. It is time for us to take a new step in the process to create a better world for all. But of course, all of our future efforts should be based on what we have achieved so far. Our systems and structures are in place. And the issues have been well defined.

I am confident that we can fully support the start-up of the new development agenda. Let us do our best together, and let us make sure that one day in the future, when we look back on what we did in 2015, we can say that we could not have done it better.

Thank you.

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