



NEWSLETTER

January - February 2021

HIGHLIGHTS

- ◇ The Economic and Social Council has held a variety of events and meetings over the last 2 months addressing issues related to racism and xenophobia and ways to strengthen the ECOSOC system and ensuring continuation of its work and the work of its subsidiary bodies.
- ◇ H.E Mr. Munir Akram, President of ECOSOC, is guiding preparations for the coming meetings of ECOSOC and its key Forums and segments. He plans to continue building upon his three main priorities for his Presidency:
 - Financing the SDGs and COVID-19 recovery;
 - Investing in sustainable infrastructure; and
 - Harnessing science, technology, and innovation for sustainable development
- ◇ Preparations continue to be made for the upcoming [High-level Political Forum \(HLPF\)](#) taking place 6-15 July 2021 under the auspices of ECOSOC. This year's theme is: "Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development".
- ◇ The [ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development Forum](#) will also be held on 12-15 April 2021. The 2021 ECOSOC FfD Forum will provide an inclusive platform to advance an action-oriented dialogue on the solutions on financing the COVID-19 recovery and sustainable development on the path to 2030. There will be a high-level special segment on financing the recovery from COVID-19, to be co-chaired by the President of ECOSOC and the President of the General Assembly.
- ◇ The [ECOSOC Youth Forum](#) will commemorate its 10th Anniversary on 7-8 April 2021. At the Forum, young people will engage in a dialogue with each other and with Member States on how best to respond to COVID-19 and on concrete actions and commitments to realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) during the decade of action.
- ◇ Other upcoming meetings of ECOSOC include special meetings on Small Islands Developing States (SIDS), Least Developing Countries (LDCs) and on Landlocked

Developing Countries (LLDCs). [ECOSOC Subsidiary bodies](#) are also meeting in the months of March and April.

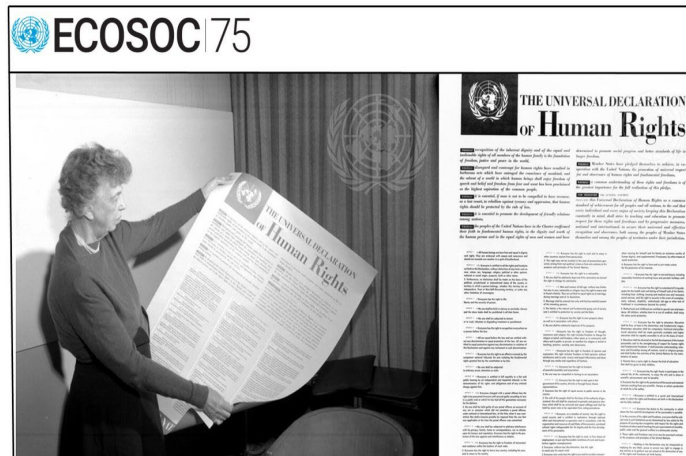
ECOSOC COMMEMORATING ITS 75TH ANNIVERSARY



On 23 January, [ECOSOC celebrated its 75th anniversary](#). In his statement, President of ECOSOC Munir Akram highlighted some of the momentous contributions of ECOSOC to international economic, social, and development policies. Over the last several decades, ECOSOC has helped establish the 0.7% Official Development Assistance (ODA) target; created the concept of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) linked to development; and played an instrumental role in the evolution of the

Millennium Development Goals into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 SDGs.

[In his remarks, ECOSOC President Munir Akram](#) stressed that “Today, the world is facing the most serious global health and economic crisis since the establishment of the United Nations and the creation of ECOSOC. Poverty has increased, as has hunger. The financial resources required for recovery by the developing countries remain to be mobilized. The achievement of the SDGs is in question. The threat of climate change appears imminent. And there is no assurance that the vaccine to halt the COVID pandemic will be equitably available to the poorer countries.” The President went on to say that with many of the SDGs now facing serious setbacks, “ECOSOC has the mandate and the responsibility to respond to these challenges.”



ECOSOC OFFICIAL MEETINGS AND SPECIAL EVENTS



On 18 February, ECOSOC held a virtual special meeting titled [“Reimagining Equality: Eliminating racism, xenophobia and discrimination for all in the Decade of Action for the SDGs.”](#) The special meeting featured keynote statements by H.E. Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa, President of the Republic of South Africa; H.E. Epsy Campbell Barr, Vice-President of Costa Rica; and H.E. Helena Dalli, Commissioner for Equality, European Commission. There were also interventions from Member States, a high-level roundtable on

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“Leaving no one behind: Eliminating root causes of racism and discrimination in the SDG era”, and a fireside chat on “Reimagining equality during and after the COVID-19 pandemic” with various experts and high-level panelists. Several pre-recorded video messages from Mr. Martin Luther King III, Global Human Rights Activist; Mr. Forest Whitaker, United Nations SDG advocate; and Professor Wole Soyinka, Playwright and Poet were screened.



The special meeting explored interlinkages between discrimination, structural racism, inequalities, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, and the unequal impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The UN Secretary-General and many Member States highlighted that all approaches to eliminating racism and discrimination must be based on the principle of providing equal access to equal opportunities. It was emphasized that racism is not only perpetrated by individuals or

single groups, but also embedded into the very fabric of various social and political institutions and in our own biases. Pakistan’s Foreign Minister, H.E. Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi, called for building a global alliance against rising Islamophobia, antisemitism, and racial violence.



In his presidential statement issued as the outcome of the meeting, ECOSOC President Munir Akram [stated](#) that “Solidarity and cooperation among countries, societies, communities, and individual citizens is the only possible way to eliminate racism, xenophobia and discrimination for all. Our economic and financial models, priorities and assumptions need to be people-centered and serve humanity. Systems that perpetuate racism and inequalities must be dismantled.”

On 27 January, the President of the General Assembly Volkan Bozkir and ECOSOC President Munir Akram held a joint meeting discussing ways to facilitate coherence in the work of the General Assembly and ECOSOC. Both Presidents highlighted the need for the work of the two bodies to complement and reinforce one another in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In his remarks, ECOSOC President Munir Akram gave a brief overview of upcoming ECOSOC and GA events, including the future Joint Meeting on the LDCs, the Financing for Development Forum, and the General Assembly review of ECOSOC and the HLPF under the facilitation of his excellency Alexander Marschik, Permanent Representative of Austria and His Excellency Cheikh Niang, Permanent Representative of Senegal. The President noted how



crucial it is for collaboration within UN bodies and stated that “Refocusing the work of intergovernmental bodies on the key issues of the 2030 Agenda and making it more efficient is essential for the success of each organ and coherence and efficiency within the UN.”



A [joint meeting of the Economic and Social Council and the Chairs of the Functional Commissions and Expert Bodies](#) was held virtually on 1 February. Many Member States and 16 Chairs or Co-Chairs of subsidiary bodies participated in the meeting. The subsidiary bodies gave a brief overview of their work and how it relates to the theme of ECOSOC. The meeting was the opportunity to

discharge the role of ECOSOC and its key functions in coordinating the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda; providing analyses and recommendations in the fields of social, economic, and financial policies; and coordinating its subsidiary bodies. The meeting was held as the General Assembly is conducting a review of GA resolution 72/305 advocating for a strengthening of the ECOSOC system.

Throughout the meeting, there were several concerns raised by the Bureau of the Council, the Chairs of the functional committees and expert bodies, and Member States. The most common themes that permeated the discussions were:

- The disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on various marginalized and vulnerable communities and on the Least Developed Countries (LDCs);
- The need for reliable, standardized, and quality data and statistical methods in order to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- The coordinated financing efforts needed for implementing the 2030 Agenda; and
- The need for collaboration between ECOSOC’s subsidiary bodies to help identify areas of overlapping mandates and promote the sharing of useful information and best practices with one another, in support of the work of ECOSOC.



From 8-17 February, the [59th session of the Commission for Social Development \(CSocD59\)](#) convened with the priority theme of “Encouraging a socially just transition towards sustainable development: the role of digital technologies on social development and well-being of all.” Throughout the session, CSocD discussed the profound role that technology has

played in transforming societies and the need for digital technologies to be used as both emergency tools and as instruments that provide opportunities for all the world’s people in efforts to create more inclusive, equitable societies.

ECOSOC President Munir Akram [stated](#) that the “existing digital divide could become the new face of the development divide”. He stressed that there is an “urgent need to tackle factors behind the digital divide which include lack of infrastructure, high cost of digital equipment, lack of digital skills and literacy, and absence of relevant content in local languages”.



United Nations

Committee for Development Policy

The [23rd Plenary Session of the Committee for Development Policy \(CDP\)](#) took place virtually on 22-26 February. The CDP addressed the following items during its Session: The ECOSOC

annual theme for 2021; the voluntary national reviews (VNRs) of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; the triennial review of the least developed countries (LDCs); the monitoring of countries that are graduating or have graduated from the list of LDCs; improved assistance for graduating and graduated LDCs; and inputs to the preparations for the next programme of action for LDCs. ECOSOC President Munir Akram delivered a statement at the opening session where he stressed that the LDCs 2021 triennial review to be undertaken by the CDP takes place in this very challenging time.



On Thursday 4 February, the ECOSOC Bureau engaged in virtual consultations with the World Bank and the IMF in preparation of the Special meeting with BWIs, WTO and UNCTAD to be held as part of the 2021 Financing for Development Forum. The two meetings brought together ECOSOC Bureau Ambassadors and Executive Directors of the World Bank Board and the IMF, among other invited participants.

The meeting discussed three issues: debt, sustainable recovery for all and investment in infrastructure. There was significant convergence of the assessment of challenges. The enormous need for finance for COVID-19 response, economic recovery and social protection programs has greatly narrowed the fiscal space for most developing countries. The need for debt restructuring and rethinking of the global financial framework in view of the worsening global debt crisis was at the center of discussions. Strengthening the integrated national financing frameworks in developing countries was mentioned as an important tool to plan for sustainable recovery financing.

In his remarks, the President of ECOSOC stressed the need for a bold, coordinated multilateral response that matches the scale of the crisis and leverages the contributions from international institutions, including the UN, World Bank and IMF. He underlined the need to employ all available instruments to bridge the increasing financing gap, especially in infrastructure investment, and engage the private sector, which has to step up the mobilization of resources for the recovery and contributed to alleviating debt sustainability challenges, particularly in the most vulnerable countries.



A side event with the topic of “Women’s human rights and environmental sustainability: challenges and opportunities” took place on 9 February. The virtual meeting was organized by the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the UN and co-hosted by the Missions of the Maldives, Qatar, Botswana, and Honduras. All participants echoed the sentiments that gender equality and women’s empowerment are fundamental human rights and central parts of the 2030 Agenda. The

meeting explored ways that women’s human rights intersect with environmental sustainability and highlighted that combating the gender-based bias, discrimination, and inequalities that many women face is essential in order to ensure the dignity and well-being of all.

In his [remarks](#), ECOSOC President Munir Akram reiterated the sustainability roles women play throughout the world, stating “As farmers, women contribute to food security and protect agro-diversity. Women manage water resources and fuel resources. They are central in the production of food in all the food-related industries including fishing. More women than men work in agriculture, forestry and fisheries.”

However, despite serving in crucial roles, the President went on to state that “less than 14% of landholders are women and women are often excluded from decision-making including environment related decision-making and planning. Environmental sustainability requires that the knowledge, skills and experiences of both women and men are incorporated in policies, which uphold the human rights of women and girls and ensure equality in all stages of the process of promoting environmental sustainability and the achievement of the SDGs. Equitable participation in decision-making on natural resources management is critical for sustainable development.”

OTHER ECOSOC POLICY DIALOGUES



On 27 January, ECOSOC President Munir Akram participated in [the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Financing for Development](#). Over the course of two and a half days, more than 200 experts from 65 member states, international organizations, civil society and academia, addressed systemic obstacles to inclusive and sustainable development in the global economy in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.



COVID-19 RESPONSE

Panelists and delegates highlighted that the pandemic has exposed the limited fiscal policy space and financial firing power of developing countries to respond to exogenous shocks on their own. Volatile balance-of-payment constraints and rising debt burdens were the result of decades of finance-led hyper globalization that had progressively shifted

bargaining power away from labor to capital, and from productive to speculative investment, thereby worsening rather than mitigating many other forms of inequality and economic marginalization. ECOSOC President Munir Akram [spoke](#) about creating a new financial architecture with four specific elements. The first of which, the President said, is “a fair international taxation system, which brings in all the big corporations that often resort to profit shifting and location in tax friendly environments.” The President indicated that “The second issue is the digital economy and the taxation of the digital economy. Third is the prevention of illicit financial flows and the return of stolen assets, which are impeded by various legislative and other conditions. And fourth is the unequal investment treaties, and the unequal adjudication of investment disputes, to the detriment of developing countries.”



On 22 February, Member States, key stakeholders, and civil society gathered for the Fifth Session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5). The session had a clear message: our fragile planet needs more ambitious action and it needs it now. More action, more cooperation, more finance, more ambition and more sustained commitment to tackle environmental crises and rebuild societies ravaged by the global pandemic. Member States expressed support for a green

post-pandemic recovery that leaves no one behind and also protects and renews the fragile natural world, with many noting that the nature’s health and human health are inextricably linked.

ECOSOC President Munir Akram [highlighted](#) that “Unfortunately, in the Industrial Era, we have severely abused nature.” He stated that “Many types of pollution are increasing with negative impacts for nature. 75 percent of the planet’s land surface has been significantly altered, over a third of our forests have disappeared, 60 percent of the ocean area is experiencing increasing cumulative impacts, half the live coral cover on reefs has disappeared since the 1870s and over 85 percent of wetlands have been lost.” ECOSOC plays a crucial role in advancing innovating ways to promoting consensus on policies and technologies to repair and prevent further damage to our environment.

UPCOMING MEETINGS OF ECOSOC

Upcoming meeting of ECOSOC include special meetings on SIDS and on LDCs and LLDCs. The [ECOSOC Youth Forum](#) will take place on 7-8 April 2021 and the [ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development](#) will be held on 12-15 April 2021.

Many of the ECOSOC Functional Group Commissions and Expert bodies are meeting. The [Commission on the Status of Women](#) (15 – 26 March 2021) is currently taking place and this will be followed

by the [Committee of Experts on Public Administration](#) (12 -21 April 2021), the [Commission on Population and Development](#) (19 – 23 April 2021), [Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues](#) (19 – 30 April 2021) and the [United Nations Forum on Forests](#) (26 -30 April 2021).

The [53rd Session of the Economic Commission for Africa](#) on “Africa’s sustainable industrialization and diversification in the digital era in the context of Covid-19” (17 – 23 March 2021) is currently taking place. The [69th Session of the Economic Commission for Europe](#) on “Promoting circular economy and sustainable use of natural resources in the UNECE region”, to be held on 20-21 April 2021, will be followed by the [77th Session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific](#) on the theme, “Building back better from crises through regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific”, to take place on 26-29 April 2021.