ON PENULTIMATE DAY OF SUBSTANTIVE SESSION, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL ADOPTS

TEXTS ON SOCIAL, HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES SUBMITTED BY SUBSIDIARY BODIES

Adopts by Recorded Votes Texts on Socioeconomic Impact of Israeli Occupation on Palestinian Territory; United Nations Support to Non-Self-Governing Territories

Touching on issues ranging from drug control to the challenges faced by indigenous youth, to post-earthquake recovery in Haiti and the critical role of the family, the Economic and Social Council today adopted 18 texts forwarded by its subsidiary bodies, as well as four independently submitted resolutions, while deciding to recommend five additional texts to the General Assembly for final adoption.

The penultimate day of both the Council’s general segment and its annual substantive session was marked by fast-paced action on diverse social and human rights questions. As high-ranking representatives of the subsidiary bodies made introductory statements, they stressed that Council action was critical in a number of respects, including convening conferences, galvanizing attention for emerging social trends and helping to set the bodies’ priority agendas and work plans for the years ahead.

With the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family slated for 2014, the Council’s participation in preparations for the event’s commemoration was crucial, said Daniela Bas, Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, as she presented a report on the work of the Commission for Social Development. That observance would be a catalyst for enhancing international support for the “nurturing role” of the family, she added, pointing out that one of the five draft resolutions recommended by the report focused on the anniversary event.

Also briefing the Council, Raymond Yans, President of the International Narcotics Control Board, stressed the need to ensure that the international system of drug control was not weakened by policies or actions that did not respect the United Nations drug control treaties. The Board’s report, which was also before the Council, made various recommendations in drug addiction prevention, measures for users, social integration and the protection of marginalized communities, among others. In addition, a resolution presented in the report laid out a strategy for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for the period 2012-2015.

That strategy was also backed by the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, whose work for 2011 was presented to the Council by Elizabeth Verville, President of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute. The UNODC

The Chair of another of the Council’s subsidiary bodies, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Edward John, drew attention to the three draft decisions recommended by the Permanent Forum and adopted today by consensus. One of those texts approved convening a three-day international expert group meeting on indigenous youth, he said, adding, in that regard, that indigenous youth faced a unique set of challenges.

The discussions of the Permanent Forum’s eleventh session had been “intense and lively”, he continued, and they had covered a wide range of issues, including the Doctrine of Discovery, climate change, violence against indigenous women, human rights, food sovereignty and the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. Another of the draft decisions recommended the venue and specific dates for the Forum’s twelfth session — namely, New York from 20 to 31 May 2013.

Other issues that came to the fore today included the plight of some 800,000 refugees that had been forced into neighbouring countries by recent conflicts in Côte d’Ivoire, Libya, Somalia and Sudan, the highest number in a decade. Briefing the Council on the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was Khassim Diagne, Head of the Office’s Secretariat and Inter-Agency Service.

In a similar vein, Charles Radcliffe, of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, spoke about the work of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. That body had tackled, specifically, the human rights of older persons, as population ageing had become a “hugely important trend”, which had not yet drawn sufficient international attention, he said.

Also today, the Council adopted four draft resolutions that were not included in reports of subsidiary bodies. Among those were a text on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which was adopted by a vote of 45 in favour to 2 against (Canada, United States), with 3 abstentions (Australia, Cameroon, El Salvador).

By the terms of that resolution, the Council, expressing grave concern at the “continuing and intensifying” policy of home demolitions and the acceleration of settlements by Israel in the territory, as well as at the continued blockade of Gaza, demanded that Israel comply with the 1994 Protocol on Economic Relations between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, among other agreements. It also called upon Israel to comply with the provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilians in time of war.

By a related draft resolution, adopted by a vote of 32 in favour to none against, with 18 abstentions, the Council urged various United Nations agencies and departments, as well as other international institutions, to issue their support to the world’s 16 remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories. It also adopted, by consensus, a resolution on the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti, by which it decided to extend the mandate of the Group until its 2013 substantive session in order to follow the country’s long-term strategy to promote socioeconomic recovery, reconstruction and stability. In addition, the Council adopted a resolution on Genetic Privacy and Non-Discrimination, also by consensus.

Making general statements on the issues discussed today were the representatives of Cyprus (on behalf of the European Union), Mexico, Chile, Belarus, El Salvador, Republic of Korea, Argentina, Ukraine, Russian Federation, Bolivia, Australia, Thailand, Georgia and Ecuador.

The Council will reconvene Friday, 27 July, at 10 a.m., to hold the final day of its 2012 substantive session.
Background

The Economic and Social Council continued its general segment today, with discussion and action expected on a host of issues forwarded to it by its subsidiary bodies in their periodic reports.


Discussion was expected on the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and on the comprehensive implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action against Racism and Xenophobia.

As for coordination, programme and other questions, the Council was expected to take action on a draft resolution related to the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti E/2012/L.16, by which it would decide to extend the mandate of the Group until its 2013 substantive session in order to follow the country’s long-term strategy to promote socioeconomic recovery, reconstruction and stability. The Group would be requested to submit a report on its work, with recommendations, to the Council for its consideration at that session.

Under its agenda item related to the implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, the Council was expected to act on a draft resolution on “Support to Non-Self-Governing Territories by the specialized agencies and international institutions associated with the United Nations” (document E/2012/L.22).

The Council was expected to act on a draft resolution entitled “Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan” (document E/2012/L.21).

Introduction of Reports

DANIELA BAS, Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, introduced the report of the Secretary-General on Preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014 (document A/67/61–E/2012/3). That report described families as the “bedrock of social stability”, and noted that they could be a force of change. However, it found that families were changing drastically because communities and values were changing.

In that regard, the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014 would be an opportunity to better support the “nurturing role” of families. Work-family balance and international solidarity should take the key role of families into account. He said the report focused on the delivery of family-centred benefits, including cash transfers and others, and encouraged Governments to strengthen the conditions of family leave, invest in family pensions and invest in programmes on youth and older persons, among other things. It also discussed specific preparations for the twentieth anniversary and encouraged States to share good practices and data on families.

Next, ELIZABETH VERVILLE, President of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), made an introductory statement on reports related to crime prevention and criminal justice, respectively, documents E/2011/30/Add.1, E/2012/30,
E/2012/30/Corr.1, E/2012/30/Corr.2 and E/2012/69. She said UNICRI did not receive any funding from the United Nations regular budget framework, but the challenges it must tackle were growing.

She said the Institute carried out action-oriented research and training, provided information and advisory services, and implemented its activities, at the request of Governments, at the interregional and national levels. It had in the past year operated in specialized niches and selected fields of crime, justice, security governance and counter-terrorism, providing added value to crime prevention, the advancement of justice and the enhancement of human rights. UNICRI also served as a platform for consultation and cooperation on sensitive issues in security governance, crime prevention and criminal justice, acting as an honest broker in bringing together different partners such as Member States, research institutions, international organizations and civil society, and in forging a common approach to addressing shared challenges.

RAYMOND YANS, President of the International Narcotics Control Board, made an introductory statement on the reports of that body’s work for 2011 (documents E/2011/28/Add.1, E/2012/28 and E/INCB/2011/1). Presenting an overview, he said that international controls on narcotics attempted to prevent the diversion of drugs from legitimate uses to criminal trafficking. In that context, the Board’s annual report sought to highlight the achievements and developments taking place in the sphere of narcotics control over the reporting period, and made a series of recommendations to Governments and the international community in that respect.

Moreover, it stressed the need to ensure that the international system of drug control was not weakened by policies or actions that did not respect the United Nations drug control treaties, he said, noting, however, the need to make certain substances available for health and sanitary purposes. He also noted, in particular, a legislative initiative in Uruguay to legalize the growing and use of cannabis, and said that the Board was engaging with that Government to discuss the potential risks of such a move. Additionally, Bolivia had recently denounced the 1961 Convention on Narcotic Drugs, and had then acceded to it again with reservations.

The main report before the Council called for the preservation of the integrity of the Conventions relevant to narcotic drug control. Circumventing those treaties at the national level could affect the entire international narcotics control system, he warned. Each year the Board highlighted a problem in a thematic chapter of the report and this year it was the relationship between social cohesion and narcotic drugs. Drug abuse could be one of the symptoms of social dislocation, social injustice, the uprooting of populations, rapid urbanization, the lack of the rule of law and other problems. The report, therefore, made various recommendations in drug addiction prevention, measures for users, social integration and the protection of marginalized communities, among others.

The Board also made “specific and constructive recommendations” to Governments, he said. Listing a number of countries with whom the Board had engaged in 2011, he added that it continued to maintain an active relationship with civil society members through “lengthy exchanges of opinions” in order to better pinpoint challenges on the ground with regard to the policy on the prevention of drug abuse. With regard to Afghanistan, he added, the situation there remained “very troubling”, as that war torn country was still the largest cannabis producer and one of the major opium producers in the world. As such, the Board had requested the Afghan Government to take the needed steps towards reducing illicit poppy and cannabis growing.

Also making introductory remarks, KHASSIM DIAGNE, Head, Secretariat and Inter-Agency Service, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, said conflicts in Côte d’Ivoire, Libya, Somalia and Sudan alone forced more than 800,000 refugees into neighbouring countries, the highest number in more than a decade. Fighting in Mali this year prompted more than 250,000 people to flee, while nearly 120,000 people had fled turbulence in Syria. While new conflicts continued to multiply in 2011, old ones simmered in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq and Somalia. The humanitarian consequences of new emergencies and drawn-out conflicts alike could only be addressed through strong coordination mechanisms and political resolve by States.
The United Nations refugee agency continued to work with its partners to address protracted situations affecting Liberian, Angolan and Rwandan refugees, among many others, he said. It also had participated in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, and had committed to nominating candidates to a roster of experienced senior staff qualified to take on Humanitarian Coordinator functions in large-scale emergencies. Another priority was to enhance its own emergency response capacity, and the agency had adopted a new approach to emergency management that relied on strong, centralized coordination and the ability to draw on the entire range of organizational capacities, resources and expertise to support operations. UNHCR also supported leadership in three global clusters it led in the inter-agency response to situations of internal displacement: protection; emergency shelter; and camp management.

In his introductory statement on human rights, CHARLES RADCLIFFE, of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, New York, said the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights — named after the international covenant whose implementation it monitored — would need additional meeting time, and he called for understanding and support on the matter from delegations.

Turning to the reports on the work of that Committee (documents E/2011/22, E/2012/22, E/2012/51, E/2012/51/Corr.1, and A/67/41), specifically on the human rights of older persons, he said population ageing was a hugely important trend which needed to be considered and articulated. The situation of older persons had not drawn the kind of focused attention that such groups as women, children and persons with disabilities had enjoyed. The report considered matters regarding older persons, including through an analysis of existing international instruments and gaps in the protection regime. Older persons represented a large and growing segment of the population and they faced particular and urgent human rights challenges.

General Debate

STELIOS MAKRIYIANNIS (Cyprus), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that, regarding social development issues, the Europe 2020 Strategy (adopted two years ago) was based on the fundamental conviction that economic and social objectives contributed to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The promotion of decent work, social protection and gender equality policies played an essential role in reducing poverty and enhancing social inclusion. The European target to reduce the number of people living at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 20 million by 2020 was backed by targets on employment and education.

The European Union and its member States reiterated their commitment to the promotion of social integration and social cohesion policies through a multilateral system which benefited from the contributions of all relevant stakeholders. For instance, given demographic trends in Europe, the bloc was very active in advancing the situation of older persons, including fostering the realization, without discrimination, of their human rights and fundamental freedoms in line with international standards. The European Union was also placing importance to addressing high unemployment among young people and the promotion of rights of people with disabilities.

ROBERT DE LEON (Mexico), focusing on the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, said that body had given attention to the important issue of violence suffered by indigenous women. It had deepened its analysis of issues such as food security, consultation mechanisms, respect for traditional knowledge, and others that had not yet been discussed in their full dimensions elsewhere. He urged the Council to ensure that the Forum continue to strengthen its cooperation with other United Nations system mechanisms such as the Special Rapporteur on indigenous issues. The Forum had also been integral in providing recommendations for the upcoming Global Conference on Indigenous People, slated for 2014, in particular in defining the modalities of that conference, he added.

OCTAVIO ERRAZURIZ (Chile) said in 2013 his country would be joining the Commission for Social Development with a view to contributing to the broader United Nations effort to improve the social situation of the most vulnerable populations. With the Millennium Development Goals deadline approaching, Chile had already attained objectives in combating hunger and child malnutrition, and had
achieved progress in reducing poverty. Challenges remained in reducing income disparities, as well as geographic, ethnic and gender inequalities. Parliament had created a Ministry of Social Development in 2011, which now provided tools to measure the impact of national social programmes.

Since 2010, half a million jobs had been generated and unemployment had dropped to 6.5 per cent. This year, the Ethical Family Income benefit was created to help families living in extreme poverty, and the Government approved maternity leave reform. Further progress had been made in the areas of reducing child and maternal mortality, improving education opportunities and grant programmes, and improving the well-being of disabled persons and the elderly. In the context of bilateral, triangular and South-South cooperation, Chile had participated in innovative programmes, including UNITAID and the Chilean Fund to combat hunger and poverty.

YURY NIKOLAICHIK (Belarus) commended the report of the Social Development Commission, in particular its work on youth and economic growth. Belarus agreed with that body’s recommendations on supporting the family and on striking a balance between work and family. One of the key goals in Belarus was creating an environment that presented opportunities to young people. Moreover, families were at the heart of Belarus’ social efforts. On matters related to transnational organized crime, he noted the need to establish a comprehensive and well-functioning system for combating such crimes in all their forms — including corruption, the trafficking of human beings and others. An important element in that regard was the strengthening of national capacities.

In that regard, he advocated strengthening the international legal regime, including through the Palermo Convention on Transnational Organized Crime, and noted the development by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) of a strategy for combating trafficking in human beings. There was a need to apply an interdisciplinary approach to that issue, he added, stressing the importance of disseminating best practice and experiences. Belarus, as the initiator of a global action plan for combating human trafficking, thanked those who had supported the relevant Trust Fund, and called on more States to contribute to that mechanism if they were in a position to do so.

Belarus felt that it was unacceptable to apply economic sanctions and other unilateral coercive measures, which were directly related to human rights. In that vein, he expressed concern about sanctions imposed on his country by the European Union and United States. The United Nations should not stand idly by, and instead should remove such measures against States or their economies. Such “politically motivated decisions” undermined the sovereignty of States and the principles of the United Nations Charter. Belarus supported General Assembly resolution 66/156 (2012) on human rights and unilateral coercive measures, and he said that the United Nations and the Economic and Social Council should seek to ensure that States implemented the provisions of that resolution.

RUBÉN ARMANDO ESCALANTE HASBÚN (El Salvador) welcomed the fruitful work done on crime prevention and criminal justice, in particular towards the elimination of violence against migrants, migrant workers and their families, which was the subject of one of the resolutions currently before the Council. Ecuador made that issue a priority and, therefore, was one of the sponsors of that text. However, it felt that it could include other elements, such as the importance of a larger number of ratifications to the Convention on the Rights of Migrants and their Families.

On human rights, he welcomed the presentation of the report of the Committee on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights, and hoped that the request for extra meeting time would be adopted by consensus. The rights of older persons was an issue of growing importance, he said, and noted the upcoming Conference on Ageing in that respect. As the report on that matter pointed out, the ageing of the population was one of the most important changes in global demographics in the twenty-first century.

Lastly, on the issue of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, he said that his delegation attached great importance on the resolution adopted this year by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on indigenous women. El Salvador would continue to play an active role
in the facilitation process of an inclusive draft resolution on the preparation of the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

CHAN KIM (Republic of Korea) commented on the questions of social development, crime prevention, refugees and human rights. The Commission on Social Development had held meaningful discussions in 2010 and 2011, but the world still witnessed inequality. International development cooperation should be strengthened, he said, noting that the Republic of Korea had hosted in 2011 a conference on aid effectiveness in that regard.

Continuing, he said crime prevention called for coordinated international effort against transnational organized crime. Efforts at the regional and national levels were equally important, and his Government had recently hosted a regional forum on the issue. The parliament of the Republic of Korea had recently passed a Refugee Act, which would enable more effective policy implementation. The Government was also committed to promoting the social integration of vulnerable groups, such as women, people with disabilities and older persons, he added.

GUSTAVO RUTILO (Argentina), speaking on the question of human rights, said the Economic and Social Council’s choice of that topic was relevant, given the growing importance of that vulnerable sector. The related report stated that human rights were often invisible in public policy. Older people often faced poverty, discrimination, violence and lack of access to services, among others. Attention to such problems had been sporadic, he said.

With that in mind, he said that resolution 65/185 offered an opportunity to reverse the situation. Member States should promote the social integration of older persons at all levels. The relevant United Nations working group had held two meetings to hear the voices of older persons and take concrete steps to address their needs. Its third session would be held in August.

HANNA PROROK (Ukraine), aligning with the statement made on behalf of the European Union on social development issues, commended the work of the United Nations Commission dealing with that topic. Her delegation was pleased with the planned focus, during the next bi-annual cycle of the Commission, on poverty eradication, social integration and decent work for all. For its part, Ukraine continued to support those themes by presenting respective national voluntary reports on Ukraine’s relevant efforts. Moreover, she said, Ukraine was working in the long-term to make social growth more inclusive and equitable, and to create jobs.

The reduction of poverty continued to be the top goal on the international agenda and in Ukraine. In response to current challenges, Ukraine had implemented last year a national system seeking to create jobs and enhance health care and social protection, in particular for children and other vulnerable groups. New social initiatives were aimed at increasing income distribution and forging a larger middle class. There had been a decrease in the number of people living below the poverty line in Ukraine, and both household earning and real wages had risen. The delegation also underscored the critical role of families in the country’s social fabric.

Speaking next, VITALII KASAP, also of Ukraine, said the delegation was committed to combating transnational organized crime. It was concerned by the links between drug trafficking, money-laundering, and, in some cases, terrorism, as well as by new forms and manifestations of transnational organized crime, which created new challenges for law enforcement systems.

Ukraine was also committed to the full implementation of the three existing drug control conventions and underscored the important role played by the International Narcotics Control Board. It welcomed the work of the UNODC in combating the world drug problem, in particular in areas such as drug control, treatment and rehabilitation, HIV/AIDS prevention and others. Moreover, the country had placed the fight against illegal drugs and transnational organized crime at the core of its national priorities, he said.
NIKOLAY S. RAKOVSKYI (Russian Federation) said that the leading role of the United Nation system on social issues belonged to the Commission on Social Development, which tackled matters such as ageing, youth and strengthening the role of the family. Notwithstanding the negative impact of the global financial crisis, not a single social programme had been abolished in the Russian Federation, he stressed. Indeed, the level of unemployment had fallen in recent years, and efforts to ensure productive work for the population would be discussed at a high-level conference in December on the practical implementation of related International Labour Organization (ILO) prescriptions. The country was also seeking to create growth in real wages and social benefits.

In order to protect the interests of the elderly, young people and other vulnerable groups, there was a separate social programme in place, he continued, adding that more attention was being paid to people with disabilities. Another important element of social policy was the strengthening of the role of the family, and the Russian Federation felt that the solidity of the traditional family was critical. On corruption, he welcomed the review of the implementation of the United Nations Convention. With regard to transnational organized crime, the delegation was keen to see the stepping up of United Nations efforts to fight cybercrime and called for the development of an international convention on that matter. He also called for stronger efforts in drug control in Afghanistan.

FREDDY MAMANI (Bolivia), commenting on the issues related to indigenous peoples, questioned the view that coca leaf chewing caused drug dependency. “There is no evidence” for such a claim, he said. With regard to the Narcotic Drug Convention of 1961, no progress was being made towards broadening its implementation internationally. Bolivia intended to remain a party to the Convention, but would continue to stress that coca leaf chewing was a cultural manifestation of indigenous people. He acknowledged the important role of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which was the only such forum within the United Nations dealing with such matters and called for the change of its name to “Forum on Indigenous Peoples”.

TANISHA HEWANPOLA (Australia), speaking on indigenous issues, said her Government had committed to address challenges in this area as a signatory to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Australia expressed support for human rights-related entities and other actors, inside and outside the United Nations, and stressed the importance of such efforts as sharing best practices. She went on to note that preparations were under way for the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, and Australia believed that the voices of indigenous peoples must be reflected during all stages of the event. The outcome of the conference should be “collaborative, constructive and comprehensive” so that action-oriented plans would be devised.

CHONVIPAT CHANGTRAKUL (Thailand) said that the draft resolution currently before the Council on strengthening the rule of law would “bring home” the indispensible role of the rule of law. In addition, better treatment of prisoners would also contribute to a safer and productive society. On transnational organized crime, he said the resolution before the Council called on States to ratify the Palermo Convention and underlined that preventive diplomacy and international cooperation were key in that regard.

On the issue of drug control, he said that the adoption of the 1912 International Opium Convention, the first ever international drug control convention, had been “seminal”. Thailand supported such instruments, and felt that the supply and demand side of reduction strategies must go hand in hand. Thailand looked forward to the international conference on alternative development, to be held in Lima, Peru, later this year. The delegation was also pleased that there was a resolution to address the specific needs of women in drug control programmes, and called for the Bangkok Rules for the treatment of women prisoners to be implemented in that regard.

ELENE AGLADZE (Georgia) welcomed the draft resolution to be adopted on access to legal aid in criminal justice systems. Georgia was one of the main sponsors of the resolution, and hoped that United Nations guidelines would be adopted in the General Assembly in that respect. The time for considering legal aid as an essential component of justice and human rights had come, she stressed.
ANDRÉS FIALLO-KAROLYS (Ecuador) said social development should be guaranteed, and it was important to put in place the relevant mechanisms to that end. There was a need to reassess existing policies so that all people could live better. It was also vital to overcome gaps in social equality within and among nations. As social issues did not receive priority attention, he said that Ecuador continued to champion social development and had attached importance to the role of the Economic and Social Council in changing that situation. The Ecuadoran Government was stepping up its efforts, including measures to eradicate poverty and invest more in health and education, among others. Integrating people with disabilities into society was also a national priority, he added.

He went on to note the presentation of several of the reports before the Council, particularly those on the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action against Racism and Xenophobia, and on the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. As for the issue of discrimination, Ecuador had this year put in place affirmative action measures for the first time in its history. He expressed hope that many Heads of Government would attend the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. “Progress had been made in this area, but much remained to be done,” he said.

Taking the floor next, EDWARD JOHN, Chairman of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, said that “numbering 370 million around the world, indigenous people are distinct peoples with their own identities, cultures and knowledge systems, with aspirations for a just world that is built on principles of equity and justice”.

The Forum was established in 2000 and had held 11 sessions to date. The eleventh session, held in May, was attended by a large number of delegates from Member States, indigenous communities and non-governmental organizations, as well as United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. The discussions were “intense and lively” and covered a wide range of issues — the Doctrine of Discovery, climate change, violence against indigenous women, human rights, the work of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), food sovereignty, and the upcoming World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

He then drew member States’ attention to the three draft decisions requiring action by the Economic and Social Council, including a text on convening a three-day international expert group meeting on indigenous youth. Lastly, he said the Forum’s name should be changed, since it was created before the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Action on Texts

The Council then acted on a number of resolutions and decisions contained in reports of its subsidiary bodies. Turning first to the report of the Commission for Social Development Report on the fiftieth session (18 February 2011 and 1-10 February 2012) (document E/2012/26), it adopted by consensus five draft resolutions, respectively on: the future organization and methods of work of the Commission for Social Development; social dimensions of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD); poverty eradication; preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family; and on mainstreaming disability in the development agenda. Also adopted by consensus was one draft decision taking note of the Report of the Commission on its fiftieth session and provisional agenda and documentation for the fifty-first session.


Taking up next the report of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice on the twenty-first session (document E/2012/30 and Corr.1 and 2), the Council, acting on the
recommendations contained in that report, decided to recommend five draft resolutions for adoption by the General Assembly. Those were on: Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners; strengthening the rule of law and the reform of criminal justice institutions, particularly in the areas related to the United Nations system-wide approach to fighting transnational organized crime and drug trafficking; United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice Systems; promoting efforts to eliminate violence against migrants, migrant workers and their families; and follow-up to the Twelfth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice and preparations for the Thirteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.

Acting on the recommendations contained in the same report, the Council adopted two draft resolutions without a vote, respectively on improving the quality and availability of statistics on crime and criminal justice for policy development; and strengthening international cooperation in combating transnational organized crime in all its forms and manifestations.

Also without a vote, it adopted two draft decisions, namely on report of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice on its twenty-first session and provisional agenda for its twenty-second session; and appointment of members of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute.


Taking up the Commission on Narcotic Drugs report on the fifty-fifth session (13 December 2011) (document E/2012/28), the Council adopted, by consensus, two draft decisions. Those were on the report of the Commission on its fifty-fifth session and provisional agenda for its fifty-sixth session; and on the report of the International Narcotics Control Board.

With regard to the annual United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Council took up the report of the Forum on the eleventh session (document E/2012/43), which contained three draft decisions. Those were on an international expert group meeting on the theme “Indigenous youth: identity, challenges and hope: articles 14, 17, 21 and 25 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples”; on the venue and dates of the twelfth session of the Permanent Forum; and on the report of the Permanent Forum on its eleventh session and provisional agenda for its twelfth session. It adopted those three draft decisions by consensus.

The Council then adopted, by consensus, a draft resolution submitted by its Vice-President on Genetic Privacy and Non-Discrimination (document E/2012/L.17). By that text, the Council invited the Inter-Agency Committee on Bioethics to continue to address regularly the issue of genetic privacy and non-discrimination in order to identify areas calling for concerted or joint efforts, as well as major gaps and constraints that need to be addressed for enhanced cooperation in the field. It also decided to close the sub-item entitled “Genetic Privacy and Non-Discrimination”.

Moving on to matters related to coordination, programme and other questions, the Council adopted a resolution on the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti (document E/2012/L.16), by which it decided to extend the mandate of the Group until its 2013 substantive session in order to follow the country’s long-term strategy to promote socioeconomic recovery, reconstruction and stability. The Group was requested to submit a report on its work, with recommendations, to the Council for its consideration at that session.

Prior to that action, the Council’s Secretary outlined the programme budget implications for the draft, saying it was anticipated that $17,500 required for one mission each to Haiti and Washington, D.C., in 2013 and related meeting support service requirements would be met within the resources, approved for Section 9, of the programme budget for the biennium 2012-2013. No additional
appropriation would be required from the General Assembly.

Turning to the implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, the Council had before it a resolution on support to Non-Self-Governing Territories by the specialized agencies and international institutions associated with the United Nations (document E/2012/L.22).

Before action, Italy’s representative said his delegation was not in a position to accept the text. “We were expecting that this was not going to be approved by consensus”.

The United States’ delegate requested a recorded vote.

By a vote of 32 in favour to none against, with 18 abstentions, the Council adopted the resolution. By its terms, the Council recommended that all States intensify their efforts within the United Nations specialized agencies and organizations to ensure the full implementation of the Declaration. The specialized agencies were requested to review conditions in each Non-Self-Governing Territory so that they could take measures to speed economic and social progress.

The resolution also urged those United Nations agencies and organizations that had not yet done so to provide assistance to the Territories as soon as possible. For their part, the administering Powers were requested to facilitate the participation of appointed and elected representatives of those Territories in relevant meetings of the United Nations specialized agencies and organizations.

Speaking after the vote, Ecuador’s representative thanked delegations that had voted in favour of the resolution.

Argentina’s delegate said the text must be implemented in line with the decisions and resolutions of the General Assembly and the Special Committee on Decolonization. Argentina reserved its position on the Food and Agriculture Organization’s (FAO) work with the 16 non-autonomous territories relating to the protection of the coastal environment, subject to additional information Argentina had requested from the FAO.

The representative of the United States noted that the resolution was virtually identical to those considered by the Council in recent years. She had abstained in the vote, despite agreeing in principle that United Nations agencies, funds and programmes could provide support to Territories, so long as administering Powers allowed it. The administering Power was to decide the participation of Territories in the United Nations. The United States Federal Government had the sole responsibility for United States foreign relations. She was concerned that the language of the text infringed on internal constitutional arrangements and thus could not support the resolution.

Next, the Council took note of the Secretary-General’s report on “Assistance to the Palestinian people”.

Following that, the Council turned to a draft resolution on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan (document E/2012/L.21).

Prior to action on that text, the representative of Algeria sought to include Palestine as a co-sponsor of the draft resolution as it was a member of the “Group of 77” developing countries and China. The Council took note of the request.

Speaking in explanation of position before action, the delegate of the United States said her Government could not support the resolution, which was “one-sided” and “biased” and included numerous “deficiencies”. Further, the text failed to take a constructive approach. The United States
sought a just, lasting, peaceful solution to the matter and it was important to measure action based on whether it would advance the welfare of the Palestinian people, particularly children.

There was a need to create an environment conducive to renewed peace talks, rather than to take a step to further undermine the process. She went on to describe how the United States had supported Palestinian people through financial contributions and other measures. She expressed disappointment at the Council’s insistence on pursuing one-sided measures and said that future energy should not be wasted. As a friend to both parties, her delegation had no choice but to vote against the resolution.

The resolution was then adopted by a recorded vote of 45 in favour to 2 against (Canada, United States), with 3 abstentions (Australia, Cameroon, El Salvador).

By its terms, the Council expressed “grave concern” at Israel’s accelerated settlement construction and implementation of related measures in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. It was further gravely concerned at the serious repercussions on the economic and social conditions of Palestinians caused by Israel’s building of the separation wall and its associated regime, as well as the resulting violation of Palestinians’ economic and social rights to work, health, property and adequate living standards. The Council demanded that Israel comply with the 1994 Protocol on Economic Relations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. It also emphasized the importance of United Nations agencies in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

Speaking after the vote, Australia’s delegate said his Government had moved from a negative vote on the text to an abstention this year, as it recognized the adverse effects of the impasse in peace negotiations on the well-being of the Palestinian people. Australia supported the development of Palestinian institutions and recognized the serious humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories, especially Gaza. It supported Palestinians’ right to self-determination and shared concerns about the expansion of Israeli settlements, having consistently spoken out against them.

Australia also was conscious of the need to recognize and address Israel’s security concerns, he said, noting that Israel had suffered from rocket attacks and that weapons were being smuggled through Gaza. Those actions must stop. The text did not adequately recognize those concerns. Australia would continue to support a negotiated two-State solution and urged both sides to resume direct negotiations as a matter of urgency.

Speaking on behalf of the European Union, Ireland’s delegate commended the flexibility shown by the Palestinian delegation. At same time, political aspects of the problem were best addressed in the General Assembly. The European Union supported a two-State solution and an independent Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security, and mutual recognition. Recognizing Israel’s security needs, he called for opening the crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid and other goods to and from Gaza.

Mexico’s delegate reiterated her Government’s deep concern at the Israeli occupation and joined the international call for immediate renewal of the peace process between the two sides. That could be achieved only through direct negotiations. She called on the diplomatic Quartet on the Middle East peace process to re-establish direct negotiations.

Canada’s delegate said his Government had long been concerned at imbalanced resolutions on the Middle East that singled out Israel. He had voted against the current text, reflecting Canada’s opposition to the unbalanced nature of the process.

Algeria’s delegate thanked all delegations that had voted in favour of the text.

The observer for Palestine said the Council’s support for Palestinians and other Arab populations under Israeli occupation had come at a crucial stage, when the world was witnessing an
escalation of Israel’s illegal policies and practices, and its contempt for the rule of law. Adherence to principles such as those outlined in the text just adopted would help alleviate grave inequities imposed on Palestinians for years.

That resolve had helped Palestinians reserve hope for a two-State solution, she said, despite, among other things, Israel’s illegal settlement campaign throughout the occupied territories. It was imperative that the international community demand the cessation of the illegal Israeli campaign and that Israel respect Palestinian rights and abide fully by its international law obligations, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. She reaffirmed Palestinians’ gratitude for the overwhelming support for today’s text, which provided a glimpse into the tragedy inflicted on Palestinians by Israel.

Speaking next, Israel’s delegate said she was disappointed that the Council had again been “exploited”. Each year, it convened to discuss global economic and social issues, but Israel was the only country singled out for biased treatment. That seriously undermined the organization’s credibility. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) had reported Gaza’s per capital gross domestic product had grown in 2011. Gaza’s unemployment also had dropped to the lowest point in 10 years. “There is a crisis in Gaza”, she said, explaining that it was the rule of Hamas, an internationally recognized terrorist organization that attacked crossings used to carry humanitarian aid only to later complain about shortages and delays. Hamas also terrorized the Israeli people, and more than 200 rockets had been fired into Israel in the last two months alone. Even amid rocket fire, Israel had ensured that humanitarian aid was reaching Gazans.

She wondered how many other Governments provided aid to areas from which their citizens were being attacked. A thriving Palestinian economy was in Israel’s interests, yet the resolution ignored Israel’s efforts to assist Palestinians. In fact, economic growth in the West Bank had accelerated and, if the resolution genuinely sought balance or accuracy, it would mention such shared concerns. Joint working groups and capacity-building programmes on agriculture and women’s empowerment, among other issues, could move forward more effectively if Palestinians cooperated more with Israel or lived up to bilateral agreements. She called for direct negotiations. The sponsors sought only to “demonize” Israel. States that had voted in favour did not serve the interests of Palestinians or broader peace in the Middle East. She strongly objected to the agenda item and the resolution.

Responding to Israel’s comments, the observer for Palestine said Israel persisted in distorting the context of the occupation. Israel was the only occupying Power in the world today. When it ended its occupation, the resolutions would cease.

The Council then took note of the Secretary-General’s note containing a report of on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan (document A/67/91-E/2012/13).

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