



## **“High level panel on System-Wide Coherence: Implications for the UN and Other Multilateral Development Institutions”**

### Panelists

- **Ms. Elisa Peter:** United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS)
- **Mr. Harald Fries:** Minister, Economic and Social Affairs Coordinator, Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations
- **Mr. Vicente Paolo Yu:** South Centre
- **Mr. Aldo Caliarì:** Center of Concern – Rethinking Bretton Woods Project

### Moderator:

- **Ms. Gemma Adaba,** International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ITUC)

On Monday 16 April, NGLS, the World Federalist Movement-Institute for Global Policy, ITUC, UBUNTU Secretariat and the Rethinking Bretton Woods Project held a panel discussion on UN System-wide Coherence in conjunction with the annual special High-level Meeting of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) with the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The event took place a few hours before the Secretary-General presented his report on the recommendations of the High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment.

### **Ms. Elisa Peter**

Ms. Elisa Peter, Deputy Coordinator of NGLS, presented the main development-related recommendations of the report of the High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence on development, humanitarian assistance and the environment.

Ms. Peter explained that the 2005 World Summit provided new impetus for UN reform, called for greater coherence in the UN’s development-related portfolio and asked the Secretary-General to explore how the UN could better respond to challenges in development, humanitarian assistance and the environment. The Panel set up by the SG found the UN’s work in development to be fragmented, weak, not properly structured to meet country needs and that policy and program interventions have not always been consistent. Recommendations include structural changes towards better coherence in a report entitled “Delivering as One” which was released in November 2006.

Ms. Peter explained that following the presentation of the Secretary General’s report, informal consultations would take place among Member States on the way forward.

She concluded that the Panel's report has the potential to lay the groundwork for a fundamental restructuring of the United Nations operational work, to improve its overall efficiency, ensure better performance and deliver results that are responsive to country needs.

**Mr. Harald Fries**

Mr. Fries expressed satisfaction over the major evolution towards concrete goals that the "One concept" represents. Mr Fries felt that situations where there were as many as twenty active UN agencies per country working with their own networks and contacts can overlap and hinder the good and coherent functioning of the Organisation. He also welcomed the idea of pilot countries arguing that it will enable tangible conclusions to be drawn.

Mr. Fries recalled three crucial criteria that any 'One UN' activity should meet: first, programmes should be in line with recipient government's priorities; second, the UN should present a comparative advantage as compared to other institutions; and third, the UN should demonstrate that it has the capacity to undertake the project - especially in small countries where its presence may be limited. Mr. Fries noted that often-times donors' contributions are ear-marked, too modest and tend to be based on the donor's priorities rather than recipient country needs. He expressed hope that the 'One UN' budget will provide a coherent framework for country programmes and create incentives for UN agencies to work together more closely.

Citing his experience in Rwanda -one of the pilot countries- he thought that a central UN leadership could be accepted and appreciated by different agencies if developed in partnership with all relevant actors.

To conclude, Mr. Fries indicated that there are of course risks that the One UN project will not meet expected results. However, he added that, regardless, the time has come for the UN to modernize so that it meets the needs of today's world. He emphasized that this modernization should not mean the loss of the unique mix of skills that the various UN entities provide at the country level.

**Mr. Vicente Paolo Yu**

Mr. Paolo Yu also focused on the Panel's recommendations that relate to development. He explained that the 'One UN' reform initiative is different from previous reform efforts because it has gathered the support of many governments and has been seen by many as providing a stronger chance for the UN to regain its role of primary international development actor. However, the South Centre remains sceptical of the substance of the report and considers its scope to be too narrow. Instead of focusing on infrastructure and country-level issues, Mr. Paolo Yu argued that the report should adopt a more holistic approach of development that takes into consideration systemic features such as Official Development Assistance (ODA) context and the international trade regime.

Examining the way forward, Mr. Paolo Yu explained that the links between the UN, the international financial institutions, donors and recipient countries should be looked into

when adjusting country programmes and framing the “One UN”. Indeed, the One country programme must be assessed to ensure that the uniqueness of each UN agency is retained. Mr. Paolo Yu noted that the possibility of an oversight mechanism of – as well as the power dynamic between - the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the WTO and ECOSOC should be investigated in order to ensure greater coherence amongst the institutions governing the global financial system.

Finally, Mr. Paolo Yu highlighted the multidimensional aspect of development, which requires a deeper analysis of how the UN can work in a more coherent manner with other institutions and partners.

**Mr. Aldo Caliari**

Mr. Aldo Caliari, representing Center of Concern – Rethinking Bretton Woods Project, presented the key points of a joint NGO position paper entitled “A Civil Society Response to the Report of the UN High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence”.

First, Mr. Caliari began by placing the Panel’s report in its historical context, whereby a growing number of development matters have been transferred from the UN to the Bretton Wood Institutions (BWIs) and, more recently, to the WTO.

Mr. Caliari went on to discuss the possibility for coherence to take place in a decentralized but well-coordinated system, rather than the assumption that coherence implies centralization. He emphasized in particular the limited space devoted to the strengthening of ECOSOC in the report, in spite of the repeated rhetorical commitments of latest UN conferences (e.g. Monterrey). While the UN Sustainable Development Board appears to undertake a wide range of responsibilities, ECOSOC’s overall capacity is not improved. Mr. Caliari argued that ECOSOC had both the capacity and the legitimacy to undertake heavier functions such as the oversight of agencies’ and funds’ budget, of the Development Policy and Operation Group and of the Development Finance and Performance Review Unit.

Mr. Caliari was worried that the report recommendations, especially the role envisioned for the UN Sustainable Development Board, may curtail the ability of national governments to communicate and choose among various UN entities regarding the provision of independent technical assistance. In addition Mr. Caliari argued that since the One Country programme is built around the MDGs, there is a risk that any policy-based work going beyond this “narrow vision” of development could lose its funding.

Finally, Mr. Caliari noted his disappointment in the proposed incentive of strengthened UN core funding to encourage agencies to adhere to a uniform view of development, arguing that it undermined the credibility of the report as it doesn’t provide for the advantages that the diversity amongst the different entities that current UN structure provides.