



**Comments from the World Federalist Movement* on
Reform of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
November 2003**

The World Federalist Movement (WFM) welcomes efforts to strengthen the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and endowing it with sufficient authority on economic and social issues.

WFM's recommends ECOSOC reform efforts take the following into consideration:

- ◆ ECOSOC should be strengthened to fulfill its mandate as envisioned in the UN Charter: to address economic and social issues with the same authority that the Security Council addresses with peace and security issues.
- ◆ Elevation of ECOSOC is a goal that many NGOs would share and to which many international, regional and national NGOs can bring enormous expertise.
- ◆ Current geopolitical developments highlight the false and destructive separation of the economic and social sector from peace and security issues. In order to address the both root causes and consequences of war and conflict, there needs to be an integration of the economic and social factors. Economic and social concerns also must be considered along with efforts to address military activity and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
- ◆ The UN Charter anticipated task sharing between ECOSOC and the Security Council.
- ◆ ECOSOC should have the capacity to hold select committee-type hearings with the view that this would have legislative impact. ECOSOC should be able to hold hearings that are analogous to finance
- ◆ Coordinate economic and social policy instead of these policies being orchestrated through the OECD, the G7. This may necessitate an executive committee of ECOSOC that would consist of a G15 that would serve the goals the Commission

* Founded in 1947, the World Federalist Movement (WFM) is an ECOSOC accredited non-governmental organization (NGO) that works on issues of international justice and democracy, peace and security, and sustainable development. WFM has significant experience working within, and organizing large worldwide civil society networks. WFM convenes a 2,000-member Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CICC) and led the 1999 Hague Appeal for Peace Conference. We also currently co-chair the International NGO Task Group on Legal and Institutional Matters (INTGLIM). WFM has been one of the primary promoters for UN access of national and regional NGOs and making sure experts from developing countries are informed of UN processes and brought directly into negotiations.

- ◆ In order to achieve serious political initiatives through ECOSOC, consideration should be given to extension of the term of the ECOSOC Presidency or to adopt a procedure for some form of collective leadership. Extending the ECOSOC President's term could allow serious political negotiations to continue to move forward.
- ◆ ECOSOC should also have the capacity to hold select committee- type hearings with the capacity for legislative impact.
- ◆ WFM does not view the Commission on Global Governance's proposal for an Economic and Social Security Council as politically possible or desirable, the goals. However, WFM does agree with the goals the Commission sought to achieve. Achieving these goals will entail:
 1. Realignment of political will
 2. Increasing the authority of ECOSOC to coordinate amongst the international finance institutions – both within the UN system and amongst other international financial bodies.
- ◆ ECOSOC should consider convening meetings of the bureaus of its subsidiary and other relevant bodies for the purpose of enhancing implementation, coordination, and reducing unnecessary duplication of efforts.
- ◆ INTGLIM's report for Rio + 5, "Renewing the Spirit of Rio"¹ recommended that the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) establish sub-commissions to address sustainable development issues neglected in other forums. Now that the CSD has been downgraded, perhaps subcommissions should be created within ECOSOC.

. In addition, the CSD should be able to initiate processes that address the remaining significant gaps

The CSD should be expanded to include enhanced subsidiary mechanisms such as those utilized in other commissions and UN bodies, including *inter alia* working groups, optional protocols, sub-commissions, and rapporteurs. The sub-commission modality offers distinct advantages over *ad hoc* and more restricted modalities utilized by the CSD. These advantages include greater focus, capacity to designate funding for the work of the sub-commission and the ability to attract high-level government representation, non-governmental expertise and media attention.

The CSD should consider the advantages of establishing sub-commissions on specific long-term areas of its work.

Recommendations for possible CSD sub-commissions

- *Sub-commission on Finance and Financial Mechanisms for Sustainable Development*
Promoting linkages between the CSD and the International Financial Institutions on global financial policies and financing for sustainable development is one of the most important subject areas for the establishment of a sub-commission. The development of innovative or independent financial resources for sustainable development and innovative UN funding should be included in work of this subcommission. If a subcommission or inter-governmental panel on financing sustainable development is established, consideration of qualified limited

¹ Pace and Verheij, *Renewing the Spirit of Rio, the CSD, Agenda 21 and the Earth Summit +5* (1997). Available at: <<http://www.igc.org.habitat/csd-97/riointro.htm>>.

membership criteria, or adopting weighted-voting procedures for limited aspects of its decision-making should be considered.

- *Sub-commission on Transnational Corporation (TNC) Reporting*
The CSD needs to be able to address such issues as corporate accountability and the enormous impact of transnational corporate activity and financial flows on sustainable development. In the context of the Johannesburg Summit, a number of NGOs are pushing for a binding convention on Corporate Accountability. At the least, a mechanism for transnational corporate reporting needs to be established by the WSSD process.
- *Sub-commission on Country Reporting*
Similar to the Commission on Human Rights and Committees, a CSD Sub-commission on Country Reporting could systematically review the member states' progress on implementing Agenda 21 and the WSSD Plan of Action.
- *Sub-commission on NGOs and Major Groups*
Creation of a "major groups" subcommission as a cross-sectoral, inter-regional forum for NGOs and major groups should also be considered. A "civil society forum" sub-commission of the CSD could be mandated, for example, to focus initially on the goals of the above-proposed financial subcommission. In other words, the CSD should consider letting NGOs and civil society attempt to develop proposals and solutions to the calls for enhanced ODA and "new and additional resources" in which governments have been largely unsuccessful. The sub-commission would also be a forum where the relatively new and still controversial concepts of "major groups," "civil society" and "stakeholder" and others, could evolve within a positive political environment.
- *Sub-commission on Indicators for Sustainable Development and Consumption and Production Patterns*
The imperative of addressing consumption and production is another area that could receive concerted and on-going attention through a CSD sub-commission.

ECOSOC and its functional commissions

- ◆ Each of the ECOSOC functional commissions needs to be significantly strengthened. They may remain primarily institutions of soft law within ECOSOC, but must have greater capacity to effectively monitor the progress of governments in meeting conference commitments.
- ◆ In order to address the cross-sectoral nature of many conferences' outcomes, each functional commission should be granted a role in reviewing and ensuring that world conferences' implementation efforts are harmonized with one another and abide firmly within the frameworks established. Through these considerations, mutual interests and complementary efforts may be identified.
- ◆ Functional commissions should review the relevant work and reports of other institutions, including the Bretton Woods Institutions, the World Trade Organization and other multilateral organizations.

Commission on Human Rights

- ◆ **Financial Support of the CHR.** Drastic budget cuts to the CHR have made it increasingly difficult for the body to complete its work in an effective and substantive manner. Specifically the cutbacks in translations and other support services have eliminated the traditional night sessions from the CHR, which were essential for getting through the enormous agenda. Where government delegations have to make interventions in a handful of minutes, and NGO representatives are limited to two and a half minutes for their reports, any real dialogue and debate is severely curtailed.
- ◆ **Financial Support of the OHCHR.** In a related issue, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights continues to be under pressure to do more with less. At only about 1.4% of the entire UN budget, and an enormous remit of issues and areas to cover, the High Commissioner's office has little choice but to beg for more voluntary contributions from member states.
- ◆ **Standards for Membership of the CHR.** Last session of the CHR witnessed rancorous debate on the issue of standards for membership in the august body. While no clear consensus appears to be emerging, this is an important issue that deserves careful study and consideration. At its base is the question: does membership entail responsibilities as well as privileges? or more pointedly, should member states that have not ratified most of the major human rights conventions and do not allow special procedures mechanisms to visit them be allowed to sit on the CHR?