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Programme
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Programa
Mundial
de Alimentos

Executive Board
Annual Session

Rome, 21 - 24 May 2001

INFORMATION NOTES



Distribution: GENERAL

WFP/EB.A/2001/INF/10*

15 May 2001

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

* Re-issued for technical reasons

REPORT OF THE JOINT MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARDS OF UNDP/UNFPA AND UNICEF (WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF WFP)

A joint meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA and UNICEF, with the participation of WFP, took place in New York on 26 January 2001, with the President of the WFP Executive Board attending.

As follow-up to a request made at that meeting, the President of the Executive Board hereby submits the Report of the Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA and UNICEF, with the Participation of WFP¹ to the WFP Executive Board and asks that the Board take note of the report and forward it to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

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Joint Meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF, with the participation of World Food Programme
New York
26 January 2001

Address by Poul Nielson, European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid: The United Nations and Europe: active multilateral partners”

The first part of the joint meeting was chaired by H. E. Dr. Movses Abelian (Armenia), President of the UNICEF Executive Board. The Administrator of UNDP, the Executive Director of UNICEF, the Executive Director of UNFPA, the Assistant Executive Director of the World Food Programme, and Mr. Poul Nielson, European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, were on the podium. The Administrator of UNDP introduced Mr. Nielson.

Mr. Nielson underlined the strengthening of relations between the European Commission and the United Nations, noting that there was scope for improvement and for the development of a more effective partnership. Cooperation with the United Nations system needed to shift to a more systematic and programmatic level, from ad hoc project-based collaboration, and to intensify the mutual engagement in a policy dialogue. The enhanced collaboration would be based on the recognition of the added value and core capabilities of United Nations bodies in relation to the development policy priorities of the European Community.

Citing the change in the European Commission's development policy during the past year, Mr. Nielson described the three major elements that had helped to shape the new approach by the European Community to development policy and development cooperation. First, the European Commission and development ministers of the European Union had, in the Development Councils of May and November 2000, agreed to a European Development Policy. Second, the fifteen European Union countries and the 77 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries in the ACP partnership had set a new milestone in the relationship between them by agreeing to the new Cotonou Agreement. Third, the Commission had taken far-reaching decisions on how to reform and radically improve the management of Community external aid. The three decisions were aimed at helping the Community to respond to the double challenge of making external aid more effective and helping developing countries to integrate progressively into the world economy.

The European Community's resultant new development policy includes poverty reduction as the central focus and as the overall objective of its policies and activities. Within that global objective, the Commission would concentrate on six areas of comparative advantage: trade and development; regional integration and cooperation, macro-economic policies linked with poverty reduction strategies; in particular the strengthening of social sectors such as health and education; reliable and sustainable transport; food security and sustainable rural development strategies; and institutional

capacity-building, good governance and the rule of law. Cross-cutting issues such as gender, environment and human rights would be fully integrated into all activities.

The Community, as one of the largest donors in the area of development assistance, was trying to make the best use of existing frameworks and processes, such as the PRSP and the UNDAF. In the development of Country Strategy Papers for the future multi-annual planning, the EU would base its programming on those instruments, where available.

The commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development had served as a base for the European Commission's new policy orientation for development cooperation. Those commitments had been fully incorporated in the ACP-EU partnership agreement signed at Cotonou on 23 June 2000. The agreement emphasized poverty reduction and the integration of developing countries into the global economy. A first step would be the reinforcement of the political dimension of relations between the ACP countries and the EU, including respect for human rights, democratic principles, rule of law, good governance, and gender equality, and attention to corruption, as well as the importance of communication and information. Regional Economic Partnership Agreements would be included in regional free trade areas, allowing ACP countries to integrate gradually into the world economy. Regional cooperation and integration was seen as a cornerstone in an effective response to globalization and trade was strongly linked to environmental and labour standard issues. The Cotonou agreement paved the way for increased foreign direct investments, which the EU intended to stimulate through a new 2.2 billion euro business investment facility. Allocation of funds would be based on evaluation of the individual requirements of each country and their performance.

Mr. Nielson also described the reform of the Commission's external service beginning in 2001. The aim of improving effectiveness was based on three main elements: a new Europe-Aid Cooperation Office to manage EU external assistance; establishment of stronger and more articulate internal mechanisms for ensuring quality and coherence of EC assistance programming; and the thorough screening of existing commitments in an effort to improve the speed and quality of spending. The launch of the first phase of deconcentration and devolution of powers to 23 delegations in 2001 was well advanced and included provision of human and material resources. All delegations would be included by the end of 2003.

One of the goals in management of external assistance was to strengthen cooperation with selected United Nations development and humanitarian bodies. Changes to legal requirements would provide scope for a more flexible cooperation with the United Nations, as well as changing the corporate culture in the European Commission with regard to the United Nations. A number of key meetings relating to eradication of poverty would be held in 2001, including the Third Conference on Least Developed Countries and the Meeting on Financing for Development.

The Community's development policy had entered a new era. Given its role as a major global partner in development cooperation, the Community was ready to bear its share of the responsibility to improve international society. More global governance was required, not less. Closer cooperation between the EC and the United Nations family would strengthen that effort.

In closing, Mr. Nielson expressed regret concerning the recent decision by one major donor regarding UNFPA, in particular at a time when there were so many abused and marginalized women who needed support from that organization. He emphasized the importance of the work of UNFPA and the International Planned Parenthood Foundation, organizations that contributed greatly to poverty eradication and a decent global community.

Comments by delegations

One delegation welcomed the “new era” in development cooperation heralded by the European Commission. In particular, partnership with the United Nations represented a very positive step. The main challenge was to intensify and build on coordination and cooperation. The speaker cited strengthened United Nations operational activities, the growing importance of regional activities, and enhanced collaboration between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods Institutions as positive developments. A realistic and holistic approach to development was required, with emerging ideas translated into policy guidance and strategies. Closer relations between the EC and United Nations in development and humanitarian activities was an important priority for her delegation, currently holding the Presidency of the European Union. Future dialogues between the Boards and the Commissioner would be welcomed.

Another delegation expressed gratitude to the Commissioner for his visit to Japan prior to attending the joint meeting of the Executive Boards. The speaker underlined the importance of ensuring public support for official development assistance (ODA) through more effective and efficient programmes. His delegation welcomed the opening of the Europe-Aid Cooperation Office. His country shared many of the objectives described by Mr. Nielson, in particular cooperation with the United Nations. At the country level, the PRSPs and sector-wide action plans (SWAPs) were key instruments. Aid coordination, the speaker noted, should be a gradual process, without imposing views on developing countries. It was important for recipient countries to select the right form of development assistance depending on the circumstances in their country. In that regard, both programme and project approaches could be considered.

Other delegations welcomed the importance the European Union placed on development assistance and the growing cooperation with the United Nations. It was hoped that the Meeting on Financing for Development would help to reverse the decline in resources for development. One delegation underlined the successful experience of regional collaboration in the Latin America and the Caribbean region in poverty eradication. Another speaker raised queries regarding coordination among programming instruments at the country level and about how individual aid programmes of EU members would be coordinated with the overall EU aid programme.

The Executive Director of UNICEF expressed appreciation for the leadership of Commissioner Nielson in forging partnership between the European Union and the United Nations. UNICEF was committed to working with the European Union in the ongoing dialogue proposed by the Commissioner. She also noted that UNICEF looked forward to the 10 year review of the World Summit for Children to be held in 2001.

The Executive Director of UNFPA thanked the Commissioner for the support he expressed for UNFPA. UNFPA would support the activities he had proposed, particularly in the regional context.

The Assistant Executive Director of the World Food Programme expressed gratitude to the Commissioner for his statement and explained that his organization had recognized the important role of the European Union by adding a permanent observer seat for the EU at its Executive Board.

The Administrator of UNDP expressed support for the partnership between the United Nations and European Union, underlining the importance of the new initiative.

Mr. Nielson responded to the comments and queries raised. He stated that the Commission looked forward to accelerating the dialogue with the United Nations. He underlined the importance of cooperation in the area of conflict prevention as well as in activities aimed at bridging the gap between crisis and development. He underlined the importance of effectiveness in development cooperation, as a means to maintain public support for ODA. With regard to programming, he emphasized the key importance of sector-wide action plans in terms of improving quality and predictability of development activities. The PRSP as a framework enabled better donor coordination, through involvement of the Bretton Woods institutions. He emphasized the need for collective action on feasible programmes with demonstrable results. In response to a query raised, Mr. Nielson stated that the EU would not provide core contributions to the United Nations funds and programmes, as individual members were already donors. It was hoped that the Meeting on Financing for Development would help to mobilize public support for ODA.

Presentation on progress with the use of common country assessment indicator frameworks

The second part of the joint meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP was chaired by Ms. Ulla-Maija Finskas-Aho (Finland) Vice-President of the Executive Board of the WFP, who conveyed the greetings of the Board's President. She informed delegations that the session would look at the progress that was being made in developing and using Common Country Assessment (CCA) indicators. She introduced the Chair of the ad hoc working group of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) on CCA indicators.

The Chair said that the development of the CCA indicators was an example of United Nations system cooperation at its best. In addition to the organizations represented on the podium, the Statistics Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), all of the regional commissions and other agencies participated actively in that work. He stressed that the CCA was a country-driven process for reviewing and analysing the national development situation, that flexible guidelines ensured responsiveness to local needs and conditions, and that the CCA promoted partnerships among national and international development partners. He stated that the list of indicators included in the framework contained in the CCA guidelines was suggestive and not prescriptive or exhaustive. The indicators were designed to

demonstrate progress towards achieving the major development goals of United Nations conferences, summits and conventions held in the 1990s. The indicator framework also helped to identify data gaps and areas in which national statistical systems needed to be strengthened.

In order to assess progress in using CCA indicator frameworks, the working group had sent a questionnaire to those countries that had completed CCAs since the guidelines had been developed and had received responses from 36 out of the 37 countries canvassed. The survey had shown that United Nations country teams, working with national Governments, were using country-specific indicators. Data availability was the key determinant of which indicators were used. Most of the country teams reported close working relations with Governments, particularly national statistical offices and line ministries, with national experts being widely used. The survey found that the role of the national statistical office was central in terms of selecting and validating the indicators. In that regard, most country teams reported that they relied primarily on national data sources and that it was only in crisis or post-crisis situation was there heavy reliance on international sources.

The survey had shown that most United Nations country teams had either established databases for the follow-up of international conferences or planned to do so. However, the ability to keep these databases up-to-date was hampered by resource constraints and lack of expertise. The indicators in CCA frameworks were used as a basis for country assessment and analysis, for identifying key areas for policy and programme development, and as a tool for joint advocacy and programming. Many country teams reported CCA linkages with other ongoing policy frameworks and several mentioned linkages with Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). A majority of country teams reported the existence of programmes to strengthen statistical capacity or planned to do so within the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

The Chair indicated that there were several future challenges. The CCA indicator frameworks needed to evolve to respond to new priorities in national plans, conference reviews and the Millennium Declaration. Data collection was costly, and there are only limited resources to strengthen statistical systems. Therefore, continued international financial assistance and technical expertise were required. Developing new indicators should build on best practices from previous experiences and should take advantage of greater country and regional participation.

Presentation by Nepal Country Team

The Vice-Chairman of the National Planning Commission of the Government of Nepal reported that the United Nations system had been working in Nepal since 1951 and that many tangible results had been achieved in improving the lives of the Nepalese people. The United Nations was a trusted friend and partner of the Government. He noted three projects in which UNDP, UNICEF and WFP were working to complement each other, by making best use of the comparative advantage of the three organizations. He took special note of the concrete steps taken in enhancing cooperation through the CCA and the UNDAF. As chair of the national workshop on the CCA draft, he had been

particularly pleased with the richness of the debate on the country's development challenges that had been generated by the formulation of the CCA.

The preparation of the CCA indicator framework over a period of 18 months had emerged from a series of consultations with various government bodies engaged in data collection as well as with policy makers and other officials who needed and used that data. They concluded that a balance needed to be struck between what was desirable and what was feasible. He singled out the United Nations inter-agency theme groups for their instrumental role in finalizing data needs and their sources. The data, comprehensive and up-to-date, would allow the Government to systematically monitor the realization of goals agreed to at the international conferences. One noteworthy intervention had been the close cooperation between the Government and United Nations agencies to make the upcoming population census more gender sensitive.

The United Nations Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative said that the CCA indicator framework in Nepal had helped to assess the overall development situation and to identify the main challenges. It underpinned the analysis of development needs and helped to monitor progress towards the achievement of global targets and the realization of UNDAF objectives. It identified data gaps and the need for capacity building. It was part of a "Triple A" strategy in which assessment, analysis and action all played into each other. The CCA indicators that were being used had been selected because of their relevance to the Nepal context and the availability and quality of data. The participants in the process, the Government, the United Nations agencies and other development partners, met in the inter-agency theme groups to decide upon the indicators. They had reached consensus on 114 indicators, based on 28 government sources and 7 international sources, although some gaps remained. To close those gaps, national information system had to be strengthened in the areas of data collection, data processing and the harmonization of national statistical systems.

The UNFPA Representative in Nepal reported that the development of the CCA indicators in Nepal had reduced duplication of efforts by different agencies and had increased team spirit and the sense of purpose among United Nations staff in the country. The CCA document that had been produced had been well received, both in Nepal and beyond. In noting lessons learned, he said that the process could have been even more participatory and that it had added to the already heavy workloads of the inter-agency theme groups. He also said that it would have been more productive to have used a rights-based approach from the beginning.

The results of the CCA highlighted the development challenges facing Nepal. The overall challenge was to reduce widespread income poverty: 42 per cent of the population lived below the Government-established poverty line, and the country's national development plan called for reducing that percentage by half by 2015. There were great disparities in income, and the country ranked low on UNDP's human development index. The country's population growth rate continued to be high (with population doubling every 29 years) and health indicators, such as the maternal mortality rate and the infant and under-five mortality rates, were disquieting. Nepal had the highest child mortality rates in South Asia, and women had little access to antenatal care. Primary school enrolment was improving but was still low compared to other countries, and there were

large discrepancies between the education of girls and boys. Women continued to suffer other disabilities as well.

The UNICEF Representative discussed how the UNDAF would help the country move from analysis to action. He gave two examples. In the first case, he began with an assessment of girls' education: the net primary enrolment rate of girls was 19 points below that of boys. An analysis of that assessment had shown that current programmes were not closing the gap and that there was a need to increase the percentage of female teachers and to improve the quality of education provided to girls. The UNDAF had now developed a joint programme to reach those goals. In the second example, the assessment showed that Nepal had gaps in the data concerning its labour market in the areas of gender distribution, child labour and the informal sector. As a result, it became apparent that the Government's employment policies were not addressing some of the country's critical problems. The UNDAF had therefore included joint support for the establishment of a labour market information system and for a labour force survey.

The WFP Representative/Country Director concentrated on joint United Nations actions in Nepal. He pointed out the geographic concentration of United Nations activities in the most deprived parts of the country. The United Nations agencies were cooperating in a number of projects in several districts in the western part of the country, which was food-deficit area. He discussed the Achham Initiative, in a western district, where UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA, WFP, UNDP and UNESCO were all collaborating on projects that encompassed women's empowerment; child survival, growth and development; control of HIV/AIDS; good governance; income generation and employment opportunities; and improvement of the social and economic status of low caste and oppressed peoples. Several agencies were also cooperating on a joint initiative against trafficking of women and girls.

The Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Nepal said that the fact that Nepal had been chosen for a special presentation to the joint meetings of the Executive Boards was testimony to the mutual confidence and successful partnership that existed between the Government and the United Nations agencies. Since those agencies had traditionally been the country's best and most reliable partners, the Government sought to increase its cooperation with them. The Government would work within any model that promised improved development performance, and he saw the CCA and the UNDAF as such mechanisms. He cautioned however that Nepal could not afford the luxury of experimentation that held no reasonable chances of success and that there was very little margin for error. He stressed that cross-donor and cross-sector compatibility were essential but that the development of a multiplicity of donor-specific planning tools would pose great problems to a vulnerable country such as Nepal.

In their comments, delegations appreciated the presentation by the United Nations country team in Nepal and the statements of the Vice-Chairman of the National Planning Commission and of the Permanent Representative. Several delegations noted the importance of the CCA and stated that it had to be at the heart of United Nations development efforts. They hoped that the role of CCA would be a focus of the discussion during the triennial policy review of the ECOSOC as well as in the substantive discussions on indicators and capacity-building in the Statistical Commission. The presentation, and that of the Chair of the undg Working Group on CCA Indicators, had

shown what the CCA could contribute to capacity-building. It had also shown the centrality of the role that indicators played in helping countries to reach their national development goals and in directing where United Nations assistance should be focused.

Several delegations stated that they were pleased that the CCAs gave priority to nationally developed indicators. One delegation said that more consideration should be given to the validity of regional indicators as well. It was stated that more had to be done in analysing the validity of the different indicators that were developed – one single, global indicator would not work for all countries. The CCAs had to be Government-owned but consultations needed to be made with all members of the United Nations system and, to the extent possible, with civil society organizations, the private sector and bilateral donors as well. There was need for greater coherence among data collection processes and demands in developing countries. It was to be hoped that joint situational analysis would help to reduce the number of analyses that donors and Government would have to do.

One delegation stressed that was vital to establish clearly that the CCAs and UNDAFs needed to correspond with the objectives of the countries concerned and that Governments needed to play a leading role in their development. It was pointed out that the indicators used to monitor progress toward conference goals needed to be reviewed for their technical validity by the United Nations Statistical Commission, an inter-governmental body. For example, for the concept of good governance there were no internationally agreed goals and no way to monitor its application. The delegation stated the need for all indicators to conform to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. It was also pointed out that the agreements emanating from the global conferences applied to all countries, not just to developing countries.

One delegation reported on its Government's evaluations of how CCAs and UNDAFs were being implemented in two countries. It reported that progress had been made in building teamwork and believed that greater collaboration in developing the CCA meant better development assistance programmes. It must be remembered that the CCA was a process and would continue to evolve and develop. Another delegation pointed out that it was ever more difficult to convince taxpayers of the value of official development assistance. The CCA and UNDAF mechanisms had roles to play in showing the public that donor funding was not being wasted. The key was to make sure that the processes did not become overly bureaucratic and that they remained flexible in meeting the needs of different developing countries. The same delegation called for more coordination with the work being done by bilateral donors.

In his response, the Vice-Chairman said that capacity-building was absolutely central to the concepts of the CCA and UNDAF. In his country, the process had worked very well, with the Government having been involved from the very first discussion on the development of CCA indicators. That was absolutely necessary if the Government was to have a sense of ownership. However, the process had revealed to what extent it was necessary to strengthen the national information infrastructure. In that regard, United Nations agencies were helping to enhance the ability of the Central Bureau of Statistics to generate and disseminate data.

The Resident Representative said that bilateral donors were involved in the theme groups and were part of the consultation process. The challenges ahead related to the shortage of data and the need to strengthen the capacity of national institutions to meet that need. The Chair of the working group said that there had been great progress in implementing CCAs, but the process was still in its infancy. It was necessary to keep reviewing and fine-tuning, especially in terms of ensuring government involvement and ownership. Further capacity-building was necessary, especially in regard to gender-related data, which were often only rudimentary. That was one area in which United Nations agencies were particularly involved. He acknowledged that there was a lack of good governance indicators. He said that it was true that the CCA was a tool for use in developing countries, however the international treaty monitoring bodies were involved in assessments in the area of civil and political rights in both developed and developing countries.

Discussion with Executive Heads of funds and programmes

The third part of the joint meeting was chaired by H. E. Mr. Gert Rosenthal (Guatemala), President of the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA. He welcomed to the podium the Executive Director of UNICEF, the Executive Director of UNFPA, the Administrator of UNDP and the Assistant Executive Director of WFP.

The President of the Board suggested that delegations move their discussion from the country level to a more corporate, general level. One delegation asked what the next step would be in integrating the CCA/UNDAF process into programme procedures. He further queried the role of a rights-based approach. The UNDP Administrator highlighted the goals adopted at the United Nations Millennium Summit, which, he said, brought new energy to the UNDAF process and committed all Governments to global and national alliances. This would allow country teams to align themselves behind the goals of the Summit, engendering more effective cooperation among all partners, thus facilitating programming. Regarding implementation of a rights-based approach, he emphasized that it was not the imposition of an outside agenda, but rather an opportunity to mobilize partners at the country level to achieve progress in a way everyone could support. The Executive Director of UNFPA noted that the rights-based approach gave Governments the tools to fulfil their treaty obligations.

The Executive Director of UNICEF stated that a number of countries – for example, Cambodia, Colombia and Mozambique -- were adopting a rights-based approach. She stressed that the CCA/UNDAF should be led by the Government, with participation of all partners, including non-governmental organizations. She noted that great progress had been made in government ownership of the process, and that the CCA and UNDAF were being linked with the PRSP and CDF. She reflected that the early joint meetings of Executive Boards had considered what the CCA/UNDAF could be, and at this meeting, Board members were already, after a relatively short period, discussing what had been achieved. In order for the process not to be a burden, both she and the Executive Director of UNFPA stated that agency situation analyses could no longer be required, and had already been replaced by the CCA/UNDAF in certain cases.

A number of delegations thanked the Nepal country team for their fine presentation and noted that there was both merit and substance in United Nations cooperation in that

country. One delegation asked how the lessons of a successful CCA/UNDAF process, as demonstrated in Nepal, could be used by other country teams, and what kind of leadership could be exercised from the central level. Another delegation queried what could be done to support wider development and dissemination of information, and asked how the Bretton Woods institutions could be more involved with the work of the United Nations system. One delegation requested information on the link between the data used in national human development reports and those of the CCA.

Regarding diffusion of good practices, the Administrator of UNDP stated that there were major efforts under way in the area of joint training, and that in cases where it was determined that the UNDAF process was lagging, missions were sent by UNDG to evaluate the situation and to support country teams with their exercises. In the area of information dissemination, he brought to the attention of Board members the new Internet sites, RC Net (the United Nations Resident Coordinator Network) and DevLink (communications to support United Nations country teams). He stated further that national human development reports drew heavily on CCAs. Regarding the cooperation of the Bretton Woods institutions, he noted that United Nations agencies were involved in CDFs and PRSPs. He emphasized that ultimately what was needed was strong country ownership.

One delegation noted that national data collection in developing countries was generally weak, and stressed the need for capacity-building. Another stated that CCA indicators should be varied and flexible, depending on the country situation. Another delegation asked for clarification on the role of regional commissions. The Executive Director of UNICEF said that regional commissions had been briefed, and there was improved and growing interaction. The Executive Director of UNFPA stated that her agency had supported regional commissions in data collection, and there was already a great deal of cooperation in this area.

The Assistant Executive Director of WFP provided an overview of periods in history when the United Nations system dramatically changed course. The CCA/UNDAF process was a logical and sensible tool to understand preceding movements, including the international conferences of the 1990s. He said there was currently a will to cooperate, and many effective country teams. He noted also, however, that each agency had an important, separate mandate.

In recapping the discussion, the President of the Board stated that there had been significant progress in the area of indicator frameworks. He highlighted the importance of government ownership, and noted that frameworks needed to be adapted to local needs.

Statement by Executive Director of UNICEF on staff security

The Executive Director of UNICEF addressed the meeting, on behalf of the UNDG, on concerns regarding staff security. She stated that the safety of United Nations staff was a matter of greatest importance for the entire system. In recent years, risks had grown sharply, in direct proportion to the spread of armed conflict and instability. She said there was an urgent need for additional resources to bring about significant improvements in staff security in the field. Only Governments could provide the political will and additional resources needed, and only Governments could institute measures to end the

culture of impunity, in which those who perpetrate crimes against United Nations staff go free.

She noted that the Secretary-General had drawn up a series of proposals designed to establish minimum security arrangements, and that he had requested that an additional \$5 million be placed in an existing trust fund. She noted that contributions to the fund had lagged, and therefore appealed to members of the Executive Boards to make a firm commitment, in order to protect United Nations staff.

In closing the meeting, the President of the Board thanked the distinguished members of the panel, executive heads of agencies, and colleagues from the Executive Boards. He noted that the meeting brought added value to the organizations concerned, without detracting from their respective responsibilities. He stated that, as requested by the Economic and Social Council, the report of the joint meeting would be transmitted to the Council by the three bureaux of the Boards.