Opening 2017 Session, Economic and Social Council Elects New President, Adopts Provisional Agenda, Working Arrangements

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[Economic and Social Council](http://www.un.org/press/en/un-bodies/economic-and-social-council)

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Opening the first meeting of its 2017 session today, the Economic and Social Council elected, by acclamation, Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava (Zimbabwe) as its new President and adopted the provisional agenda and working arrangements for its upcoming session.

The 54-member body — which serves as the principal organ for the socioeconomic and related work of the United Nations — also elected three Vice-Presidents.

They were:  Marie Chatardová (Czech Republic) from the Eastern European States; Cristián Barros Melet (Chile) from the Latin American and Caribbean States; and Heiko Thoms (Germany) from the Western European and other States.

The election of the Vice-President from the Asia-Pacific States would be held at a later date.

Delivering remarks on his vision for the Council’s proceedings in the upcoming year, Mr. Shava warned that there were many worrying trends in the world today.  On a near-daily basis, the international community was confronted with disturbing reports of instability and armed conflict, global humanitarian and human rights crises, terrorism and violent extremism, inequality and growing economic, social and environmental tensions.

Nevertheless, there was hope, stressed Mr. Shava.  It had been emphasized time and again that the world today was more capable of meeting development aspirations than at any other time in human history.  The opportunities for eradicating poverty and empowering people through investment, trade, sustainable production and the provision of services were unprecedented.

He went on to highlight his priorities for the upcoming session, saying he hoped the Council would dedicate adequate time to the question of infrastructure development and industrialization, including in Africa and for all countries in special situations.  Further, given the important nexus between development, human rights, peace and security, he would explore options for enhancing the partnerships between the Council and other relevant United Nations bodies.

The 2016 session marked a landmark year for the Council, recalled Oh Joon (Republic of Korea), the body’s outgoing President.  The Council had been built on the belief that economic and social progress was essential in the promotion of peaceful relations among nations, as well as human rights and dignity.  Having celebrated the seventieth anniversary of the Council and been faced with a variety of global challenges, the body had set off on a journey to achieve the most ambitious development agenda in history.

Turning to the Council’s working methods, Mr. Oh said it was high time to think seriously about how to transform the Council to make it fit for purpose in the context of the United Nations development system.  While the new tasks given to the Council strengthened its function, they also raised questions about its original mandate and the powers of its elected members.  Now that an important part of its work was to prepare and hold a large number of forums involving all Member States, the Council would need to operate within the wider context of the General Assembly, particularly when it came to development issues.

“We must admit the lack of coordination in the current state of play and have to work together to find ways to enhance coordination in the system,” he emphasized.

Further, while the principle of consensus-building must continue to be respected, it should not work as if every Member State had veto power and was able to block the work of the Council, he continued.  A new mindset and attitude, particularly a renewed spirt of cooperation, would be required to overcome the outdated divide between the groups of developed and developing States.

Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, speaking on behalf of Wu Hongbo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, recalled that 2016 was a momentous year in the history of the Council.  Nevertheless, the body had its work cut out for it with regard to supporting early efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.  To deliver on the future development framework, all countries needed to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals into their national policies and plans.  In that regard, the Council had a wide range of platforms to support States and partners as they moved forward with that transition.

Given its leadership role in facilitating civil society participation at the United Nations, the Council could help bring together a range wide of partners to forge innovative solutions to some of the common problems the world faced, he said.  The body should strive to provide normative guidance and tools for implementation of the 2030 Agenda, support countries’ capacities for national implementation, build awareness and engagement around the global Goals, and encourage partnerships and networks for sustainable development progress.

In other business today, the Council adopted the provisional agenda for its 2017 session (document [E/2017/1](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/2017/1)) and a draft resolution which established its working arrangements for that session (document E/2017/L.1).

Following the adoption of the agenda, the representative of the United Kingdom delivered a statement on behalf of the European Union, saying that the bloc did not see the need for the Council to host both the High-level Political Forum as well as a high-level segment.  The two segments should be merged, as the current status quo created confusion and redundancy.