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Message by
H.E. AMBASSADOR MILOŠ KOTEREC
PRESIDENT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
TO THE ELEVENTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION

New York, 16 April 2012

Distinguished Delegates and Observers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address the opening of the 11th session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration.

Today, we find ourselves in uncertain times with economic slowdown and as we seek to respond effectively to these challenges, we recognize the critical role and increasing relevance of public administration and governance - *not only at the national, but also at the local level.*

Appropriately then, the theme of this session is “local public administration and governance for results” particularly in support of the internationally agreed development agenda, including the Millennium Development Goals – the MDGs. This theme is fitting and also highly relevant to the work of the Economic and Social Council and its 2012 Annual Ministerial Review, which assesses progress on the MDGs and the international development agenda. For the 2012 Review, which will take place in July, the Council has set the theme as: *“Promoting productive capacity, employment and decent work to eradicate poverty in the context of inclusive, sustainable and equitable economic growth at all levels for achieving the Millennium Development Goals”*.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Employment, a focus of the Review, is an issue that demands our immediate and renewed attention in this rapidly evolving global economic landscape, especially with only three years left until the 2015 MDG target date. The recent ‘jobless recovery’ and persistent unemployment in the world is cause for serious concern. Without substantial job growth, we will have a difficult time addressing the vital nexus of economic growth, employment and poverty reduction, on which the progress of our development agenda heavily depends. Our concern also lies in the *quality* aspect of employment and not just the *quantity* aspect; especially, given prevalent lack of the so-called ‘decent work’ even in the parts of the world, where economic growth has supported job growth.

Productive capacity, another focus of the Review, which is intricately linked with the issue of employment, is also an important matter. Productive capacity matters, particularly, for the world’s poorest countries. It enables countries to exploit economic opportunities, create productive employment and sustain economic growth. But the existing productive capacity problem is exacerbated by the current world economic situation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Ineffective public administration and poor governance can jeopardize the progress of the major development agenda, including the employment and productive capacity-related agenda. The adverse effect can be *amplified* in these times of global economic uncertainty, rendering added urgency to the improvement of government at all levels.

Successful ‘decentralization’ or ‘localization’ of public administration and governance in terms of formulating and implementing policies reflecting local needs and priorities can make an immediate and substantial difference in the daily life of citizens. Local governments also have a significant impact on employment and poverty eradication in their areas of jurisdiction. But in tough economic times, local governments may be less able to manage their reduced resources in keeping with local priorities.

Using public service delivery as an example: There exists a real danger of the reduction, re-centralization or even collapse of local public services. These services include basic services such as water, which are essential to poverty eradication at the grassroots level. Importantly these services are mostly delivered at the local level. Hence, amid such uncertainty, the role of local public administration and governance is becoming increasingly critical for the effective delivery and prioritization of services conducive to poverty eradication, so as to mitigate the adverse effects of the economic crisis for all, especially the disadvantaged groups.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Local public administration and governance can indeed support or undermine a country’s progress on MDGs. If our development agenda is to have traction, the promotion of requisite local government and governance capacity should be at the heart of our development efforts.

Let me take the use of information and communication technologies – ICTs - as an example, with its tremendous potential for expanding productive capacity, strengthening citizens’ employability, and facilitating overall sustainable

development. As the *United Nations e-Government Survey 2012* found, e-government has strongly shifted expectations of what governments can and should do through the application of ICTs to strengthen public service and advance equitable, people-centred development.

But this potential remains largely untapped, especially, at the local level, and this is often due to local governments' lack of capacity, information and awareness about how to effectively harness the potential of ICTs and generally provide a sustainable basis for development. As a result we have to do better in building local government capacity and awareness.

The capacity of public administration - called 'a vehicle to govern' - is indeed very important. But it is *part* of the solution, not the whole solution. We also need to take into account the shifting locus of governing power - away from 'government' to 'governance'. This shift entails not only changes from a hierarchical, to a more networked citizen-centric relationship, but also to new, emerging and reconfigured types of relationships between governments at different levels.

Governing power now rests in so many different places. It is, therefore, essential to develop a governance framework to ensure effective collaboration and coherence across different levels of government, while also building resilience within all levels of government. As a result, strong and coordinated efforts on national and local priorities and their implementation are becoming increasingly important, not least because of growing financial and economic pressures.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The vision of local public administration and governance needs to be aligned with the major development goals, including employment and productive capacity improvement. The deliberations during this week-long session should begin with these development goals in mind.

The Committee of Experts on Public Administration is mandated to provide advice and to report to the Economic and Social Council in support of its work on sustainable development, particularly with reference to its governance and public administration dimension. The outcome of the session should inform the Council's work in this dimension for inclusive, sustainable and equitable economic growth.

It is my sincere hope, therefore, that these issues will be discussed during this session *in concrete terms* and I would like to invite the Committee to provide specific inputs to the Council and for consideration by the Member States. I also call on you to provide concrete advice on ways for follow-up by the Secretariat and how to scale-up related efforts.

I am waiting with great interest for the outcome of this session and counting on your valuable insights and advice.

I wish you all a successful, productive session. Tha

Thank you.