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Statement by Mr. José Antonio Ocampo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs to the 5th Session of the Committe of Experts on Public Administration
New York, 27 March 2006

Distinguished Committee Members, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

First of all, I would like to congratulate and welcome the newly appointed Members of this Committee of Experts on Public Administration. You represent a rich diversity of countries and of expertise. I also want to thank all CEPA members, new and old, for their contributions to the work of the United Nations in this important field. And I am sure you will join me in welcoming and acknowledging our many partners here today, representing other UN organizations, academia, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

Today I want to discuss with you the prioritization of our efforts in governance and public administration. Let me begin, however, with the context of wide-ranging UN reform, within which this fifth session of the Committee must conduct its work.

The decisions of the 2005 World Summit on development issues, on reforming the Economic and Social Council and on strengthening the coherence of the UN system have provided major impetus for our work in the economic and social areas.

From this perspective, three aspects of the Summit Outcome stand out.

First: an intensity of focus on implementing the UN Development Agenda. World leaders committed to deliver on promises made at the UN global conferences and to make real the global partnership for development, strongly reaffirmed at the Summit and set out in the Millennium Declaration, the Monterrey Consensus and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

Second: a determination to foster a more coherent and effective United Nations. The Summit Outcome calls across the board for strengthening the link between the UN system's normative, analytical and operational work. It calls for better integration of economic, social and environmental policies at all levels; for better management of UN entities dealing at country-level with environment, development and humanitarian assistance; and for better integration of UN efforts in peace and security, development and human rights.

Third: a commitment to greater UN engagement with other partners and stakeholders. This means the multilateral financial, trade and development institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector.

We see these three features not least in the commitment of all Member States to adopt, this year, comprehensive national strategies to meet the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs by 2015. We also see them in the new functions assigned to ECOSOC:

- Conducting annual reviews of progress toward the development goals;

- Convening the global Development Cooperation Forum;
- Building the Council's capacity to respond rapidly to trends or emergencies that may threaten development progress;
- Re-conceiving the Council's role in fostering global policy dialogue; and
- Playing a major role in overall coordination of UN funds, programmes and agencies.

And the entire ECOSOC system—including the Council, the regional commissions, functional commissions and expert bodies like CEPA—is expected to operate around the single framework of the development goals, to help monitor and drive their implementation.

Putting into effect this new ECOSOC system will require all its components—including the Secretariat entities that support them—to sharpen their focus. This was a key purpose of our exercise within the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs—EC-ESA—to review together our priorities and programmes in light of the Summit Outcome, working especially through our 11 thematic task forces, of which Governance and Public Administration is one. The same motivation is behind the Summit's call for the review of mandates, in which the General Assembly will soon engage, to prioritize the work of the Organization and improves its ways of functioning across areas.

For UN entities in the economic and social fields, confronting this challenge begins with a single question: How best to advance integrated implementation of the internationally agreed development goals? Strategic positioning of each entity within the emerging new ECOSOC system—and of the system itself within the broader UN framework—will depend on this. And that puts this Committee at a distinct advantage, for the imperative of good governance clearly cuts across the whole UN Development Agenda. As the World Summit reaffirmed, "good governance and the rule of law at the national and international levels are essential for sustained economic growth, sustainable development and the eradication of poverty and hunger".

The way forward is to find a key set of cross-cutting issues that put work in governance at the centre of finding solutions to our common development challenges. As I told the Members of the Economic and Social Council earlier this year, in the drive to implement the UN Development Agenda, this is the year when the rubber hits the road. And in this effort, you in this Committee have a unique contribution to make, as, say, expert "motorists" in implementation. I want to tap your creativity and experience here—and to seek your feedback on how we can prioritize within this most crucial cross-cutting work. For the moment, I see four focus areas, each of which could be further defined.

First is strengthening participatory governance. This will be the theme of our 2007 World Public Sector Report. " Good governance". "Participatory governance". "Democratic governance". And so on. There is a need for much more analytical rigor in examining these concepts and the substantive differences between them, if any, and in elaborating their meaning in the context of our work in development.

In this last respect, the Summit Outcome offers valuable guidance—focusing our attention on the need to introduce and sustain participatory processes in the structures and processes of development management. This means engaging all stakeholders, including the least advantaged, in policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and review. Such a focus area has a direct bearing on our present work to help Member States formulate their national strategies for achieving the development goals—through advisory services and through the creation of "tool-kits" on specific issues, designed to facilitate the translation of our normative and analytical work into country-level implementation; a particular concern here is the mainstreaming of social objectives into economic policymaking.

How do you think we should proceed in this area? And what about the related issues of participatory budgeting and participatory auditing. What can we learn from the institutional innovation taken in a growing number of countries to establish a platform for national dialogue on the key economic and social issues, bringing together such stakeholders as government, business, trade unions, small farmers, scientists, academia, indigenous peoples and other citizens' groups? Can we support these processes? And how does all this connect up with our commitment to gender mainstreaming and the mainstreaming of human rights into development processes—to help give content not only to civil and political rights, particularly rights of political participation, but also to economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development?

A second focus area is supporting public sector reform. Within this area, I see three priority issues. One is, of course, promoting accountability, integrity and professionalism in the public sector. The other issues I have in mind are public-private partnerships and public enterprises. The amount of attention to and, indeed, excitement about the prospects of public-private partnerships in helping to achieve the development goals has not been fully matched by sober analytical assessments of the challenges involved in building and managing such partnerships—and in measuring their performance. On the other side of the spectrum, the role of public enterprises has for awhile received little attention, let alone acclaim, until recently, when the subject has come back to the forefront, with a new interest in how and to what extent public enterprises have a role to play in implementing the development goals.

A third focus area is ICT, e-governance and knowledge management for development. A main emphasis here is analytical and operational work to strengthen governments' capacity to use ICT for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of their performance and delivery of services. How can we encourage stepped-up efforts to employ e-governance not only as an information tool, but also for increasing public participation, still an area where ICT is vastly under-utilized. Another emphasis is national capacity-building in knowledge management, where UNPAN represents a wealth of institutional memory upon which to build. Moreover, knowledge management is increasingly becoming a, if not the, key ingredient for our working better together as a system, whether within DESA, EC-ESA or the wider UN. The Secretary-General strongly underscored this point in his report "Investing in the United Nations: for a stronger Organization worldwide". I am eager to hear your thoughts on this front, too.

Finally, a fourth area of focus is rebuilding governance and public administration in post-conflict situations. Peacebuilding has the potential to become a major force for strategic integration in UN efforts to help member states achieve their development goals and in the UN's wider work. For it is here that all aspects of the UN's mandate come together, in peace and security, development, human rights and humanitarian assistance. But in practice the approach often remains disaggregated, without a clear development dimension incorporated into either the political processes to prevent conflict or its recurrence, or into efforts focused on strengthening respect for human rights and the rule of law. The creation of the Peacebuilding Commission is a step in the right direction. We need, however, to find a way fully to harness our capacity in post-conflict recovery, peacebuilding and building inclusive societies and bring it positively to bear in the wider work of the UN in peacebuilding and in human rights. What are your thoughts?

Strengthening participatory governance; supporting public sector reform; ICT, e-governance and knowledge management for development; and rebuilding governance and public administration in post-conflict situations—I am eager to hear what you in this Committee make of these four focus areas. And what are your suggestions for how we can sharpen the focus further still, for how we can prioritize our cross-cutting work?

I thank you for your attention. And I wish you a most productive session.