

*Speech for the President of the Economic and Social Council
Opening Session
8th Session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration
30 March 2009*

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am extremely delighted to be here with you today and to address the Committee of Experts on Public Administration in my capacity as the President of the Economic and Social Council. I am well aware of the important contributions made by this Committee to the furthering of the United Nations' development goals. And I am equally persuaded that this year's proceedings will further enhance the coherence and synergy of our work towards the advancement of effective governance systems for sustainable development.

This year's theme is particularly important in these times of crises.

Indeed, in any financial or environmental foundering, the capacity and resources of those who serve the people are the first to undergo cuts. I am referring to public servants serving the people as we speak, teachers who educate young minds, social workers who assist the most vulnerable, law enforcement officers who ensure the safety of our communities, to name just a few.

We should not forget that as a prominent policy maker once said “when government institutions fail, people die.”¹

There are many challenges faced by the human factor in capacity-building and development today. Let me mention briefly three of them:

First and foremost, we need visionary and strategic leadership.

To fight poverty and famine, to address the energy crisis, to combat the financial meltdown and to address global warming, we need, first and foremost, “covenantal leaders”² who not only have the necessary knowledge, training and skills, but who work on behalf and in the interest of the people.

We need leaders who understand the hardships faced from within, who can evaluate them objectively and who can mobilize people’s voices and minds collectively to create a national vision.³

The **second** challenge of the human factor is the intrinsic relationship between capable leaders and the very institutions they lead. Effective institutional design and working public institutions, with strong legitimacy and high performance, rarely come short of nurturing

¹ Asch, Chris Myers. Founder of the Public Service Academy. Found at *New York Times* <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/07/us/07academy.html?partner=rss>

² The term “covenantal leader” inspired from Pava, Moses. *Leading With Meaning*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

³ Kauzya, John-Mary. *Presentation DPADM/DESA*. Found at <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UN/UNPAN030039.pdf>

leaders. Yet, leaders can neither flourish nor thrive in decaying institutions plagued by corruption and devoid of the rule of law.

Thirdly, we must, now more than ever, focus on Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as cross-cutting enablers of development. ICTs, if and when applied appropriately, can revolutionize business processes and the management of information, thereby significantly improving the performance of public sector bodies and public service delivery. The question is *how* to use these tools to strengthen human capacity in governance and development.

The information age is not only about an opportunity for the public sector to achieve greater efficiency but also about an opportunity to spread knowledge and rekindle trust between government and its citizens. This is achieved by no other means than by reinforcing and reinvigorating the role of the human factor in development.

A very pertinent example is the current e-discussion initiative on global public health launched in the MDGNet by the collaborative efforts of various actors, including the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Through this open, online and multi-stakeholder forum, experts and non-experts alike are able to share lessons learnt on how to combat health care challenges, thereby contributing directly to the building of bridges to make the world a healthier place.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In this information age, nowhere is the need for strengthening human resources greater than in the public service. Much of the future thus rests with crafting innovative public administration institutions and leaders who are as committed to the public good as they are prepared for the new challenges of this new era.

How can electronic and mobile government be used effectively to improve health and education? How can they be better harnessed with effective leadership in promoting transparency, accountability and inclusive governance? And how can these qualities be institutionalized in order to continuously and effectively respond to the changing needs of citizens?

These are only some of the key questions that the topic of the human factor in development entails us to ponder. In this respect, I am convinced that your discussions in this session will be extremely beneficial to give answers to these and related questions while steering policy-makers in the right direction vis-à-vis policy-making on the human factor in public administration and development.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before concluding I would like to thank the Committee for responding favorably to the Economic and Social Council's request to contribute to its 2009 Annual Ministerial

Review on the theme “Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to global public health”.

The Economic and Social Council is working to increase its effectiveness as the principal United Nations body for coordination, policy review and guidance on economic and social development issues. The new methods of work of the Council, including the Annual Ministerial Review and the Development Cooperation Forum, are designed to advance the United Nations Development Agenda. We will however not be able to succeed without the cooperation of others.

I thank you for your attention and look forward to your fruitful deliberations.