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**Opening statement by
H.E. MR. LEO MERORES
PRESIDENT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL**

**GENERAL DEBATE OF THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT OF
THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
New York, 1 July 2008**

Distinguished Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year marks a special milestone for the Council as the first high-level segment with two new full-fledged functions: the Annual Ministerial Reviews and the Development Cooperation Forum. I am pleased to welcome you all to the opening of the general debate.

This year's theme for the AMR is sustainable development, and yesterday, we heard from eminent experts on how we should put our efforts together to promote sustainable development to overcome the challenges posed by the climate change, loss of biodiversity and desertification.

High food prices coupled with record high oil prices and financial downturn, we are facing a very difficult time. This is particularly so for countries with special needs: the least developing countries, the landlocked developing countries and Small Island Developing States. Here again, we need to work together and help one another to weather the difficult time but also to set into motion a long term series of steps which will help address the structural and systemic problems which have led the world to this state.

With the challenges of climate change, desertification and biodiversity loss surrounding us, it is far more evident than ever that sustainable development is the key to the success of our development efforts. It is time to make difference in the way we think and act. As a way of focusing our debate, we are organizing a roundtable tomorrow, concerning sustainable development. The roundtable will focus on ecosystem services

and we hope that this debate will contribute to a better understanding of the role of economic valuation and incentives for conservation of ecosystems.

The Council's choice on the theme for the thematic discussion is very timely in this regard. Under the theme, "Promoting an integrated approach to rural development in developing countries for poverty eradication and sustainable development, taking into account current challenges", the Council will not only review the implementation status of its Ministerial Declaration of 2003, but also address new challenges of global magnitude. In May, we had the opportunity to address the global food crisis and demonstrated that the Council could bring together key stakeholders defining a concerted, coordinated and comprehensive response.

We will also hear from the experts in two roundtables on Thursday: one on bioenergy and the other on harnessing the current boom in agricultural commodities for poverty eradication and sustainable development. On bioenergy, key consideration will be ways to promote both food and fuel production while enhancing energy and food security, mitigating the effects of climate change and promoting rural development. In the other roundtable, the key focus will be on ways to promote small-scale farmers, who constitute a large share of agricultural producers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The inaugural Development Cooperation Forum opened yesterday, and will be held in a parallel session with this general debate. We have had very enriching and candid discussions so far. This year, the DCF is a unique opportunity to build consensus on and influence discussions in other international fora such as the Accra High-Level Forum on

and energy prices, the struggle to mitigate and adapt to global climate change, the urgent need for a renaissance of agriculture and rural development. We have also given strength to the national focus of the Council through the National Voluntary Presentations and the specific country sharing of experiences with the wider membership. In addition at the DCF, we shall be able to look at these concerns from the perspectives of aid effectiveness – at ways of making aid have a greater impact on development solutions.

I hope that during our general debate, member states and other interventions and interactive discussions will focus on this broader agenda. This rich blend of formal interventions and interactive discussions will enable the high-level segment of ECOSOC serve as a quality platform as envisaged in the outcome of the World Summit. We have moved in significant ways to give effect to what our leaders wanted ECOSOC to become. Promoting a better understanding and strengthening the will for collective action are the basic principles of multilateralism and to me it is clear that the Council now epitomizes, in an inclusive way, these basic principles to guide our future action, focus on implementation and lead to the changes that we would like to see.

I look forward to an engaging and enriching general debate.

We shall first hear from Mr. Thomas Stelzer, the Assistant-