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## **Report Discussion on Coherence Panel Report** **December 6, 2006**

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Debate on UN System-Wide Coherence Panel Report: "Delivering as One"

To streamline the coherence of the UN work in the fields of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment, a High-level Panel on UN System-Wide Coherence published a comprehensive set of recommendations in November 2006. On December 6, 2006, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), in co-operation with the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS), hosted a roundtable discussion between representatives of civil society, government and UN staff to share views on the Panel's recommendations. The debate made clear that political trust in the UN, and in particular its development and aid mechanisms, needs to be rebuilt if there is to be a realistic chance of the implementation of the Coherence Panel's recommendations.

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On December 6, 2006, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), in co-operation with the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS), hosted a luncheon roundtable to share views on the recommendations and the way forward following the release of the report of the High-level Panel on UN System-Wide Coherence entitled "Delivering as One".

The debate brought together about 35 senior representatives of civil society, government and UN staff. After a short welcome address by Ms. Elisa Peter, NGLS and Mr. Juergen Stetten, FES, the floor was given to Mr. Adnan Z. Amin, former Executive Director of the High-level Panel's Secretariat, who provided an overview of the Panel's key findings and recommendations. The following report summarizes the results of the discussion.

The Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit invited the Secretary-General to launch further work to ensure that the UN maximizes its contribution to achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including developing proposals for more "tightly managed entities" in the fields of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment, and to strengthen the links between the normative and operational work of the United Nations.

The Panel presented recommendations for reforming the UN machinery in the field of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment. It also put forward recommendations for changes in the overall governance, funding and business practices of the UN:

Regarding *development*, the Panel stated that current UN operational activities are too fragmented and incoherent. Moreover, because donors often follow their own priorities and fund their own UN 'pet projects', developing countries' own needs are often overlooked. To address this, the Panel advised the UN to deliver as "One UN" at the country-level. One UN should consolidate all UN programs and activities at the country level, and do this according to the country's – and not the donors' – set of priorities.

To lead such a One UN Country Program, the role of the UN Resident Coordinator needs to be strengthened. This would require the role of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to change, particularly regarding its function of management of the Resident Coordinator system. The Panel recommended UNDP to devolve its activities in sectors also addressed by other UN programs and, in order to prevent duplication of work, to establish an institutional firewall between UNDP's programmatic work and its

management of the Resident Coordinator system.

Streamlined operational activities at the country-level should be mirrored by transparent financing frameworks. The Panel recommended a pilot phase with five One UN Country programs, for which donors should provide funding on a more predictable multi-year basis. Instead of donors, the One UN country team should decide on the allocation of resources and it should do so based on the priorities expressed by the recipient country.

In the field of *humanitarian assistance* the Panel's recommendations reiterated the UN's unique and leading role. Continued efforts will be necessary to improve and streamline the UN's capacities even further. For example, the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has developed a cluster approach for delivering humanitarian assistance that identifies organizational leaders for areas in which there is a recognized gap in humanitarian response. The cluster approach proved useful in the humanitarian reaction to the recent earthquake in Pakistan, but could still be improved. Moreover, the Panel requested donors to substantially increase their contribution to the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). The Report also advised that UNDP become the UN coordinator of early recovery and the leader for the transition from relief to development. Finally, the Report pointed out that internally displaced persons (IDPs) currently outnumber refugees. The report recommends clearer responsibilities within the UN System for addressing the needs of internally displaced persons.

On the issue of the *environment*, the Panel advised that the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) should be upgraded to have real authority as the UN's "environmental policy pillar". It also recommended the strengthening of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) as the major financial mechanism for the global environment. UNEP should have a significant increase in normative and analytical capacities, as well as financial resources so that it would become an indispensable tool for strengthened international environmental governance.

To consolidate and strengthen the abovementioned operational functions, the Panel proposed a series of measures to consolidate the governance and management structure of the entire UN development machinery. To begin with, a Global Leaders Forum of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (L-27) should be established to provide high-level leadership on long-term sustainable development policy formulation

and coordination. In addition, to increase system-wide coherence and to oversee the One UN country programs, the Panel argued for the establishment of a UN Sustainable Development Board, which would report to ECOSOC, and would be responsible for operational coherence, system-wide implementation of policies and for the performance of One UN at the country level. The Panel recommended that three years after its inception, the effectiveness of the Sustainable Development Board be assessed. This assessment should include consideration of the scope for integrating the boards of UNDP, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNICEF as segments of the Sustainable Development Board. Finally, to improve financing and business practices both on the donating and the receiving end, the Panel recommended that UN organizations that demonstrate their reform efforts should receive full, multi-year core funding.

Based on the key recommendations of the Panel, the subsequent debate brought to the fore additional issues from governmental and non-governmental perspectives.

To begin with, one NGO participant raised the concern that the Report's recommendations manifest an ongoing redefinition of terms by which the economy is reduced to development and, in turn, development is reduced solely to aid. Instead, the UN and ECOSOC should go back to a more comprehensive approach and address imbalances in the global economy.

The establishment of a UN Sustainable Development Board was greeted with skepticism. Some participants asked how realistic the implementation of this recommendation would be. Given the turf wars of the different organizations and their leading donors, as well as the Board's anticipated concentration of power, it was unclear how an agreement could be reached. As one NGO participant pointed out, coherence problems at the UN are often as much bureaucratic as they are political and the Panel's recommendations will have to be gauged against this reality.

It was noted by some donor country representatives that this report was really about increasing the efficiency of aid delivery. The aspect of the report that represents this concept best, the One UN country strategy, received cautiously positive feedback. Among the donor country representatives, it was acknowledged that contradictory donor agendas at times have inhibited development on the ground. In the future, donors should not only request good governance by the

recipients of aid, but they would have to prove their own "good donorship" as well. While it was agreed that the malpractice of funding pet projects should be terminated, the question remained how, under the One UN strategy, donors could in practice still make specific allocation decisions. It seemed that the crucial issue was that priority setting be undertaken by the receiving country first - only then would donors be encouraged to make voluntary contributions accordingly. This would help the UN to improve its aid effectiveness and credibility. There was general agreement that the report was right to focus on the country-level first.

For many poor countries the UN is still the preferred development partner compared with other multinational actors, such as the Bretton Woods Institutions. Yet, despite the need for consolidation of the UN development apparatus, the organization would be ill advised to fully merge all its work under one roof. A full-fledged consolidation would do away with the useful "brand identity" that many UN programs have developed over the decades. Many participants shared the view that the Panel's recommendations were a good compromise between the need for unity and effectiveness on the one hand and diversity on the other.

Participants also discussed the question of gender equality, which was dealt with as a cross-cutting issue by the Panel. NGO representatives generally welcomed the recommendations for consolidating the current three gender-related entities into one new UN body, which would be headed by an Under-Secretary-General. At the same time, it was pointed out that "more coherence" does not necessarily mean "more strength". It was noted that the 'devil is in the details' and that while a new UN gender architecture is a good first step, it remains to be seen, if implemented, how this would translate into more effective gender mainstreaming throughout the UN system and in its field operations.

Expressing similar sentiments, an NGO representative commenting on the environmental pillar of the report felt that while he found the recommendations to be generally positive, he would reserve judgment until it was defined exactly how they would be implemented - if at all. Moreover, he felt that the recommendations did not go far enough in reforming the UN environment architecture and delivery of related programs. However, it was noted that this weakness was, in part, due to the current process in the General Assembly on the same subject.

Several participants pointed to the crucial importance of non-governmental actors for all of the UN's field-level work. Therefore, the role of NGOs should also influence the selection of countries for pilot studies with One UN country-level programs. Whether these and other recommendations will be followed up upon, however, remains a matter of the UN Member States. The bottom line is that political trust in the UN, and in particular its development and aid

mechanisms, needs to be rebuilt if there is to be a realistic chance of the implementation of the Coherence Panel's recommendations.

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