Highlights of the sixth Joint NGO Briefing Series

Productive Decent Work:
101st session of the International Labour Conference (30 May – 15 June 2012) and High-level Segment of the UN Economic and Social Council (2 – 9 July 2012)

On 24 April, the United Nations Information Service in Geneva (UNIS), the NGO Liaison Unit of the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) and the United NationsNon-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS) jointly organized another session of the bi-monthly “Joint NGO Briefing Series.” This sixth edition focused on “productive decent work” – a theme to be discussed at both the 101st session of the International Labour Conference, as well as the High-level Segment of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Following welcome remarks by Alessandra Vellucci, Chief of the Press and External Relations Section of UNIS, the briefing featured a presentation by Ana Teresa Romero, Chief of the External Relations and Partnerships Branch of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on decent work, ECOSOC, civil society and the post-2015 international development agenda. The envisaged presentation by Andrei Abramov, Chief of the NGO Branch of the Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), who would join the session by video-link and speak on the opportunities for NGO participation in the 2012 Substantive Session of ECOSOC, could not take place due to technical difficulties encountered in setting up the video connection. Ricardo Espinosa, Chief of the NGO Liaison Unit (UNOG), briefed NGO participants on any other business.

Thematic focus: Productive Decent Work

ECOSOC High-level Segment

The High-level Segment of the 2012 Substantive Session of ECOSOC consists of the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR), including National Voluntary Presentations, the Development Cooperation Forum (DCF), a thematic roundtable discussion, high-level policy dialogues, as well as several ministerial breakfasts. See the full programme here.

The AMR will focus on “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.” The UN Secretary-General’s Report on the theme of the 2012 AMR will provide the basis for the discussion. An advance unedited version of the report is available here.

The thematic roundtable discussion will address a related theme: “Macroeconomic policies for productive capacity, employment creation, sustainable development and
the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, in the context of sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth in pursuit of poverty eradication.” Click here to access the advance unedited version of the UN Secretary-General’s Report on this theme.

The International Labour Conference – 101st session

The 101st session of the International Labour Conference will focus on issues, such as the unprecedented youth employment crisis; the Social Protection Floor (including the elaboration of an autonomous Recommendation); and fundamental principles and rights at work (FPRW).

For more information on the 101st session of the International Labour Conference, click here.

Presentation by Ana Teresa Romero, Chief of the External Relations and Partnerships Branch of the International Labour Office (ILO)

Ms. Romero spoke on the issue of decent work in relation to the thematic discussions that will mark this year’s AMR and the post-2015 development agenda. She explained that the issue of decent work was already discussed at ECOSOC in 20061 and that the 2012 AMR offers an opportunity to revisit this theme in order to see what kind of progress has been made since then. The issue is also pertinent considering the confluence of crises that the world has been and continues to face and their impact on the labour market.

Ms. Romero continued by explaining the four pillars of the decent work agenda:
1) promoting respect for rights at work as human rights;
2) employment creation – to provide people with opportunities to work themselves out of poverty;
3) social protection – to have minimum standards of social security to protect workers; and
4) social dialogue – to give both workers and employers a voice through democratic decision-making processes in the work place.

She further noted that, from ILO’s perspective, NGOs are key partners at the national level, as they have the capacity to advance the development agenda through their advocacy efforts, e.g. for passing specific legislation, but also through knowledge sharing, and programme implementation. NGOs are change agents that shape discussions and influence other stakeholders, such as parliamentarians or the public domain. She noted that ECOSOC’s High-level Segment, which will take the social and labour aspects of development into account, will provide a good opportunity for participation of NGOs.

In terms of the post-2015 development agenda, Ms. Romero highlighted that the international community was starting to reflect on what must be done after 2015, when the deadline for the MDGs comes to an end. It is also a priority in the UN

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1 See: Ministerial Declaration of the High-level Segment of ECOSOC (2006) on “Creating an environment at the national and international levels conducive to generating full and productive employment and decent work for all, and its impact on sustainable development.”
Secretary-General’s Five-Year Action Agenda. In her opinion, the post-2015 development agenda should build on the MDGs; taking into consideration this existing strengths and weaknesses. The sustainable development agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), seems to provide a good basis as it is widely discussed at the UN and among civil society in the lead up to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and beyond (e.g. at UNCTAD XIII). According to Ms. Romero, ECOSOC should play a role in supporting the sustainable development agenda and provide opportunities to move forward the Rio+20 outcomes, including at country level. This is also where the decent work agenda and the rights-based approach fits in.

Ms Romero underlined that ECOSOC is one of the fora in which civil society has a strong voice and called upon NGOs to use their ECOSOC consultative status to drive discussions on the decent work agenda within a post-2015 development framework. She identified the AMR, the DCF, the ministerial breakfasts and the side events organized during the High-level Segment as important opportunities for NGO participation.

**Questions from the floor**

1) On opportunities for NGO participation in the High-level Segment: Which NGOs are going to be invited? What is the selection procedure (and criteria)?

Ms. Romero explained that the ministerial breakfasts, organized during the High-level Segment, are normally (co-)sponsored by UN agencies/organizations that want to address a specific theme relevant to the AMR debate. However, in some cases, these agencies and organizations can decide to co-organize a breakfast with other partners, such as Member States, foundations, the private sector and civil society.

Mr. Espinosa further explained that NGOs with ECOSOC status that want to speak at the High-level Segment should have sent proposals for oral and written statements to the DESA NGO Branch by 6 April 2012.

Please note that only organizations in **general** and **special** consultative status are allowed to make oral presentations to the Council. NGOs in **general**, **special**, and **roster** consultative status can submit written statements relevant to the work of ECOSOC on subjects in which the organization has a special competence.

The list with registered NGOs will be discussed during the May 2012 session of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, which will decide on which NGOs can make an intervention at the High-level Segment.

Civil society participation in the other segments – Coordination, Operational Activities, Humanitarian Affairs, and the General Segment – of the 2012 ECOSOC Substantive Session is less bound to these strict regulations, and more flexible in nature.

2) Will the promotion of decent work within the informal economy be considered, especially in relation to youth employment?
Ms. Romero explained that the AMR will feature decent work opportunities, including for youth, created in different countries. The main focus will be on sharing success stories of government and private sector initiatives in order to better understand what kind of institutional arrangements (or enabling environment) are needed for initiatives to stand a chance of succeeding and to be applied in other countries.

She noted that the informal economy remains a precarious issue that needs to be addressed. The issue will be covered in the discussion on the aforementioned Secretary-General’s report on “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 MDGs.”

Ms. Romero also referred to a session that will be organized by the UN Peacebuilding Commission during ECOSOC that will focus on countries emerging from conflicts and crises, and the role of training as well as the institutional arrangements needed to integrate young people in the labour market.

3) How are “good practices” or “success stories” defined? Is a set of criteria used to evaluate good practices?

During the Annual Ministerial Review, nine countries (Algeria, Brazil, Ecuador, Kenya, Mauritius, Qatar, Russia, Senegal and Ukraine) will be making National Voluntary Presentations (NVPs). These countries have put themselves forward to review their progress in implementing internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs, and to share development strategies that work.

Before the National Voluntary Papers of these countries were finalized, national consultations took place, including with NGOs. Based on these consultations, countries may decide to invite an NGO representative to speak during the NVP in order to share their views on what worked and what can be improved.

4) Will the issue of new information and communication technologies (ICT) and its impact on the division of labour, social protection and social dialogue be discussed at ECOSOC?

It will be addressed at the High-level Segment, but not in the discussion on the Secretary-General’s report. Ms. Romero underlined that the role of ICT can no longer be ignored, especially when discussing youth employment. New technologies facilitate part-time work, work in callcenters, subcontracting, etcetera, and have changed and will continue to change the old employer-worker relationships and representation. It also has an impact on trade unions, as this new kind of labour force demands different strategies to get them organized. Ms. Romero further highlighted that the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is also working on this issue.

5) How can NGOs contribute to ILO’s International Labour Conference?

The ILO maintains different rules for NGO participation at its Conference. For NGOs to participate, they need to go through a rather difficult vetting process by ILO’s governing body. However, this should not be seen as an obstacle for NGOs to
participate in labour-related debates, as they can still participate through other UN processes or at the national level, e.g. by participating in field consultations and by lobbying those organizations/unions/government representatives that do have access to the ILO Conference.

6) Considering the youth employment situation, to what extent will youth be represented at the International Labour Conference and ECOSOC?

Various participating stakeholders have a strong youth interest. For example, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), as well as other trade unions, will represent youth and send youth representatives as they are trying to encourage and reach out to youth in order to rejuvenate trade unions. In addition, some organizations that participated in national/regional consultations might be selected to represent young people. Some Chambers of Commerce are also active in trying to support young people in setting up businesses.

Any other business – Ricardo Espinosa

Sorry Ricardo, I missed this part!

Some information on NGO input: Extracts from the presentation of Mr. Abramov, Chief of the NGO Branch of the Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)

Below follows some information that was extracted from the presentation prepared by Mr. Abramov who could not participate at the actual briefing due to technical difficulties encountered.

NGO input in the preparations:
To assist in defining the priorities for the 2012 AMR, preparatory activities were held at national, regional and global level. These preparatory activities incorporate inputs from a wide range of stakeholders, including from NGOs. For example the Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination (OESC) convened a workshop in December 2011 that drew on the participation of senior experts from the UN system, labour institutions, academia, the private sector, civil society, workers and employers organizations. An e-discussion was also held to elicit the participation of a broad group of policy-makers, practitioners and researchers pertaining to the AMR theme. At the national level, governments were encouraged to involve NGOs in the discussion and preparation of the national reports for the National Voluntary Presentations. Country-led regional preparatory meetings were held (final quarter 2011, first quarter 2012) in which NGO representatives participated as speakers and experts, providing substantive support.

Ministerial Breakfast Meetings
As Ms. Romero also explained at the briefing, UN organizations/agencies might consider co-sponsoring ministerial breakfasts with other actors, including civil society organization to showcase their innovative partnerships and/or approaches to promote productive capacity, employment and decent work.
Side events

NGOs in consultative status in cooperation with Member States and UN system organizations and agencies could organize side events on specific issues of relevance to the theme of the AMR during the High-level Segment. However, as Mr. Espinosa explained, registration of such events was already closed at the time of the briefing.

Development Cooperation Forum (DCF):
As part of ECOSOC’s High-level Segment, the DCF usually extends over a period of 1.5 days and includes approximately 5 to 6 main plenary sessions and roundtable discussions, following an opening by the UN Secretary-General. The DCF will review trends and promote development cooperation, improve its quality and maximize its impact and results to accomplish national development priorities of developing countries and the Internationally Agreed Development Goals, including the MDGs.

It will bring together the wide spectrum of development cooperation actors in a multi-stakeholder and interactive policy dialogue to spur debate on national policies that have succeeded to advance development goals. A number of side events – organized and sponsored by Member States, the UN System, and NGOs – also take place during the DCF High-level Forum. There is an opportunity for participation of NGOs on panels and interventions throughout the session and through background documents.