Corinne Momal-Vanian, Director of the United Nations Information Service in Geneva, chaired the briefing, which was also attended by Ricardo Espinosa, Chief, NGO Liaison Office and featured a presentation by video link from Andrei Abramov, Chief, NGO Branch, Department for Economic and Social Affairs.

ECOSOC

Mr. Abramov started to outline the opportunities for NGO participation in the 2013 Substantive Session of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), including the Annual Ministerial Review by saying that the recent NGO Committee meeting in New York had on it’s agenda 355 applications, 100 reports and a number of other matters. This session had set a new record in the number of applications approved of 159. This confirmed the Committee’s view that civil society was a key player in development, he said.

He also announced that on 24 January the President of ECOSOC had formed a multi-stakeholder advisory group including 30 NGOs, representatives from the private sector, philanthropic foundations and parliamentarians which was to act as advisor to the President of the Bureau and work to mobilise civil society partners. The full work programme of this group was still being prepared and a second meeting was planned for March which would cover issues at the heart of social and economic development.

He added there were currently a number of processes underway, which looked to the post-2015 agenda; follow up to Rio+20 and strengthening of ECOSOC. Mentioning Agenda 21, a non-binding, voluntarily implemented action plan of the United Nations with regard to sustainable development adopted in 1992, he said this programme had resulted in two work processes with human development issues taking the form of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the environmental concerns expressed through the UN Convention on Climate Change and Biodiversity.

However, this approach had led to gaps in implementation and development and new systems should move back towards the original focus. In order to achieve this ECOSOC was mandated by the outcomes of the Rio+20 to become an integration platform for the three pillars of Agenda 21; economic, social and environmental aspects. This would require profound change in the work of ECOSOC. He added that the first meeting of the High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda had been held at United Nations Headquarters in New York, on 25 September 2012 and had begun the process of merging the above-mentioned aspects.

The main theme of ECOSOC’s substantive session this year was to be “Science, technology and innovation, and the potential of culture, for promoting sustainable development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.” This covered issues such as fostering agreement on key policies, raising productivity, decent work, sustainable social integration, highlighting positive synergies and the connection between science, technology and innovation with development.

All the work of the substantive session was aimed at a contribution to the Post-2015 Agenda and Rio+20 follow-up, he explained, with two reports from the Secretary-General making concrete recommendations on the topics. Meanwhile Bulgaria, France, Thailand and Viet Nam were to make presentations. Ahead of this, there were five preparatory meetings, two already held in Amman and Lima, two in Bangkok and Dar-es-Salaam in March and one planned for Geneva in April. Also planned was an ECOSOC Youth Forum on shaping tomorrow’s innovators in March and a global preparatory meeting to identify key issues for the substantive session in April.
Significant input from NGOs was foreseen during the Council, he said, and suggestions for speakers, innovative ideas or themes for Ministerial Breakfasts were welcomed and could be sent to him by email. Applications to hold side events could be made directly, through NGO Liaison or through the ECOSOC website.

Calls for written or oral NGO statements on the themes of the substantive session would be issued in March and efforts to combine statements between NGOs and a focus on recommendations were appreciated.

An Innovation Fair was once again scheduled as part of the programme, he added, and its four thematic areas would be promoting sustainable energy; improving healthcare from innovation; promoting food and water security; and social media as a tool for advocacy.

Answering questions he said that the terms of reference for NGO participation could be shared by Mr. Espinosa and NGLS which served as one of the main points of outreach for this meeting.

On another point, he said work had just begun on the scheduling of the high-level segment and they were trying to leave space for NGOs. He thought that around 15 to 20 could be accommodated for speaking engagements, which was more than previously. In this, content could be sought on several levels, including operational activities.

Asked about how multi stakeholder engagements could be made more efficient he said that this was a key issue for his work, and Member States supported efforts to make the diversity of civil society more accessible.

Asked about the voice of NGOs in the migration debate he said that groups would be participating in hearings on migration on 15 July, thereby providing input into international inter-governmental processes on this subject. There was also a thematic debate on entrepreneurship for development planned.

On the topic of private sector involvement he said there were a number of enterprises working with ECOSOC in a strong framework of social responsibility and work was being realised through both philanthropy and under the auspices of the Global Compact. In this vein better partnerships were continually being sought.

Asked about another point he said it was important for Member States and NGOs to figure out internal coordination processes, and how to channel the views of the grassroots more efficiently to the Member States, as it was not practical for each and every one of them to take the floor. He also admitted that the political process to finding the Post-2015 path would be difficult and acknowledged that calls for products to bear the additional price of sustainable development would not always be well received.

Asked about a meeting on indigenous peoples planned for September 2014 he said that at this stage no agenda had yet been developed.

The latest date for NGOs to approach the NGO Committee to get the right to speak at the Council was March, he said. Finally, a report on the multi-stakeholder approach was soon to be made available through his office. This was an important document and a number of consultations on partnerships were to be included.

**Flash update**

Mr. Espinosa said that NGO Liaison Office had a new colleague Sandrine Burel, a liaison assistant.
Study on ageing conference

Vitalija Gaucaite-Wittich for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) said the UNECE was to host a Regional Conference on, “Enabling Choices; Population Priorities for the 21st Century,” in Geneva on 1 and 2 July. The conference, jointly organised by UNFPA was to bring together 200 to 250 delegates to review the progress made towards the goals and objectives agreed at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD, 1994) and identify gaps and emerging issues that need to be addressed. NGOs were welcome to attend and preparation was already underway with three other meetings on the topic taking place in March and April.

Disaster reduction post-2015

Aurelia Blin for the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) said there were materials available at the back of the room outlining UNISDR’s key dates in the process towards developing disaster reduction planning in the post-2015 framework. The next event in the schedule was the Fourth Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, Geneva, Switzerland, 19-23 May 2013 (for which NGOs can register on line by clicking here http://www.preventionweb.net/globalplatform/2013/registration/form/step1

Please see herewith some background documents:
http://www.preventionweb.net/globalplatform/2013/assets/documents/administrative_arrangements.pdf

Update on the development of a post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction (Hyogo framework of Action) through a multi-stakeholder consultation process
Background documents:
http://www.preventionweb.net/files/25129_posthfatimeline.pdf
Working title:
UNECE Regional Conference

ENABLING CHOICES:
POPULATION PRIORITIES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Geneva, 1-2 July 2013
Room XVIII

Purpose
To review the progress made in the UNECE region towards achieving the goals and objectives agreed upon at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD, 1994, Cairo), identify existing gaps and emerging issues related to population and social policies that need to be addressed for accelerating the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and for reducing inequities.

Organization
The conference is organized jointly by UNECE and UNFPA.

Participants
The Conference will bring together 200-250 high-level representatives of governments, civil society organizations and academia, as well as members of national parliaments.

The role of NGOs
Selected NGO representatives will be invited as speakers. Other representatives from NGOs, accredited with ECOSOC, are invited to participate in the Conference as observers.

Registration
Registration will be open in March 2013.

For more information please refer to the UNECE Population Unit's webpage:
http://www.unece.org/pau/icpd_beyond_2014.html