



Committee History and Structure ***Economic and Social Council***

September 18, 2013

“If the United Nations does not attempt to chart a course for the world’s people in the first decades of the new millennium, who will?”

*–7th UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan¹**

Introduction

Comprised of numerous committees and agencies, the United Nations (UN) is an international organization established in 1945 to promote peace and international economic and social cooperation among Member States.^{2*} The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) council is one of the “most complex part[s] of the UN system, covering the broadest areas of activit[ies], the majority of expenditures, and greatest number of programs.”³

Origins, Membership and Mandate

ECOSOC was established in 1946 with 18 Member States.⁴ Membership expanded from 18 to 27 in 1965 and again to 54 members in 1973.⁵ As per article 61 of the Charter, the General Assembly elects 18 members of ECOSOC for three-year terms each year.⁶ The five permanent members of the Security Council (the victors of WWII: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) are almost always elected and regional representation is taken into consideration during these elections.^{7*} Additionally, membership in ECOSOC is renewable immediately following the end of the term, which has allowed several states to gain near-permanent member status in the council.⁸

ECOSOC was established as a principle organ of the UN through articles seven and eight of chapter three of the UN Charter.⁹ ECOSOC fulfills its mandate under the overall authority of the General Assembly and with the consultation of a broad range of civil society actors and in conjunction with the work completed by its subsidiary bodies.¹⁰ ECOSOC has 14 UN specialized agencies serving under the body, in addition to nine functional commissions.¹¹ Its main goal is to serve as the means of rectifying the instability in the international system caused by poor economic and social conditions.¹² ECOSOC serves to “promot[e] higher standards of living, full employment, and economic and social progress; identif[y] solutions to international economic, social and health problems; facilitat[e] international cultural and educational cooperation; and encourag[e] universal respect for human

¹ United Nations, *Press Release SG/SM/7342*, 2000.

² Karns & Mingst, *International Organizations: The politics and Processes of Global Governance*, 2004, p.98.

³ Karns & Mingst, *International Organizations: The politics and Processes of Global Governance*, 2004, p.114.

⁴ Karns & Mingst, *International Organizations: The politics and Processes of Global Governance*, 2004, p.114.

⁵ Benett & Oliver, *International Organizations: Principles and Issues*, 2002, p. 97.

⁶ United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945.

⁷ Green, *ECOSOC: Its Role and Its Achievements*, 1952, p.74.

⁸ United Nations Elections, *Economic & Social Council*, 2011.

⁹ United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945.

¹⁰ Baylis & Smith, *The Globalization of World Politics: Introduction to International Relations*, 2005, p.410.

¹¹ United Nations Economic & Social Council, *Subsidiary Bodies of ECOSOC*, 2011.

¹² Shestack, Schachter & Kennedy, *The Charter’s Origins in Today’s Perspective*, 1995, p.50.

rights and fundamental freedoms.”¹³ These duties allow ECOSOC to “serve as a site for the negotiation, evolution, and implementation of norms” essential in promoting peace and prosperity in the international sphere.¹⁴ The council also highlights “critical problems and potential dangers” in regards to economic and social issues, allowing the council to be among the first to detect rising issues in the international community.¹⁵ In order to further this goal, ECOSOC began holding Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) meetings and Development Cooperation Forums following the 2005 World Summit, as established by UN resolution *A/RES/60/1*.¹⁶ Following these meetings, policy ideas and recommendations are presented in the form of a Ministerial Declaration, relaying the work of the organization and possible avenues for future discussions.¹⁷

In addition, ECOSOC provides a unique forum for non-governmental actors to discuss policy areas that affect their interests, including more than 3,400 recognized non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are consulted on a variety of economic and social matters.¹⁸ In 1998, ECOSOC began meeting with the heads of various economic institutions, such as state finance ministers, members of the World Bank and of the International Monetary Fund, leading to an increase in cooperation between these financial institutions.¹⁹ An extensive amount of data is collected and assessed by ECOSOC in order to gain a better understanding of the current problems effecting member states. ECOSOC has “played a major role in the technical assistance program” in order to aid less developed areas in gaining the skills and knowledge established in more developed areas.²⁰

Focus on Human Rights

The necessity to expand diplomatic ties and multilateral cooperation in all areas of economic and social affairs has led to an increase in the importance of the United Nations and of ECOSOC.²¹ Resolutions that attempt to highlight the at risk nature of certain groups fall among the many areas addressed within ECOSOC.²² Following the 2005 World Summit in New York, former Secretary-General of the UN Kofi Annan spoke highly of the importance of protecting human rights and noted that these rights “constitute one of the three pillars - along with peace and security and economic and social development - that form the base of all the UN’s work.”²³ The importance of “economic development of underdeveloped areas” has been recognized and made a priority for the council, including the focus on the rights of those living in more impoverished areas of the world.^{24*} Accordingly, there has been a rise in awareness of minority rights, rights of populations considered to be more vulnerable, such as people with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) individuals, those infected with HIV/AIDS, and women and children living in less developed areas. In this regard, ECOSOC “adopted a series of resolutions during the 1950s and 1960s directed both at preventing future disability and at rehabilitating existing disabilities.”²⁵ This topic has remained important for the council and has led to a renewed focus on individuals with disabilities, as noted within resolution 2010/13, which focuses on the importance of addressing those with disabilities in the development agenda.²⁶ Another example is the 2010 ECOSOC AMR, in which the focus was placed on “[i]mplementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women,” to focus on the disadvantages caused by the existing gender bias in the international system.²⁷ In addition, several subsidiary bodies of ECOSOC focus their deliberation entirely on issues pertaining to minority rights, including the Commission on the Status of Women—now UN Women—and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.²⁸

¹³ United Nations Economic & Social Council, *About ECOSOC*, 2011.

¹⁴ Hurrell, *On Global Order: Power, Values, and the Constitution of International Society*, 2009, p.182.

¹⁵ Green, *ECOSOC: Its Role and Its Achievements*, 1952, p.74.

¹⁶ United Nations, General Assembly, *2005 World Summit Outcome (A/RES/60/1)*, 2005.

¹⁷ United Nations Economic & Social Council, *About ECOSOC*, 2011.

¹⁸ NGO Branch, *Department of Economic and Social Affairs*, 2011.

¹⁹ United Nations, Economic & Social Council, *About ECOSOC*, 2011.

²⁰ Green, *ECOSOC: Its Role and Its Achievements*, 1952, 75.

²¹ Bardford & Linn, *Reform of Global Governance: Priorities for Action*, 2007.

²² United Nations Economic and Social Council, *Mainstreaming Disability in the Development Agenda (2010/13)*, 2010.

²³ Terlingen, *The Human Rights Council: A New Era in UN human Rights Work?*, 2007.

²⁴ Green, *ECOSOC: Its Role and Its Achievements*, 1952, 75.

²⁵ Stein, *Disability Human Rights*, February 2007, p.88.

²⁶ United Nations Economic and Social Council, *Mainstreaming Disability in the Development Agenda (2010/13)*, 2010.

²⁷ United Nations Economic and Social Council, *President’s Corner*, 2011.

²⁸ United Nations Economic and Social Council, *Subsidiary bodies of ECOSOC*, 2011.

The unique role of NGOs in the council has increased awareness of minority rights issues and garnered support for groups that promote those rights.^{29*} In July 2010, ECOSOC granted consultative status to the tenth organization working internationally for the protection of sexual minority rights, a step that has led to an increase in the focus of LGBT issues in the international sphere.³⁰ Recent discussions over reforming ECOSOC have placed a focus on the importance of the council within the organization, and have highlighted the growing necessity to encourage international cooperation in a broad range of issue areas in order to promote the values that are expounded by the United Nations.³¹

Agenda Topics for the TCMUN Conference

At the 2013 Teton County Model United Nations Conference, the General Assembly First Committee will consider the following topics:

1. Evaluating the Progress and Projections of the Millennium Development Goals
2. Environmental Migration and Social Vulnerability as a Result of Climate Change

When writing your position papers and resolutions, think broadly about these issues, remembering both the overarching goals of the United Nations and the perspective of the country you represent.

Annotated Bibliography

Baylis, J. & Smith, S. (2005). *The Globalization of World Politics: Introduction to International Relations*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Baylis and Smith present a comprehensive overview of the United Nations system. Within the analysis the major components of ECOSOC are presented, in addition to an analysis of reforms undergone, as well as possible avenues for future changes in the committee. Major developments in the economic and social sphere are outlined and key concepts in international relations theory are highlighted in order to gain a better overall understanding of ECOSOC's role in the international system.

Benett, L. A. & James, O. (2002). *International Organizations: Principles and Issues 2nd Edition*. Upper Saddle river, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Benett and Oliver detail some of the major issues currently facing the United Nations. Membership, representation, voting, formal, and informal, and Charter amendments are discussed, while highlighting the unique facets of the major UN bodies, including ECOSOC. Through the discussion of the Charter, the reader is better able to understand the reforms that have occurred, as well as many of the current problems facing ECOSOC and this knowledge can aid one to understand how to address the current issues facing the international system.

Green, J. (Fall, 1952). ECOSOC: Its Role and Its Achievements. *World Affairs*, 115(3): 74-76.

The text written by Green presents a detailed look at the foundation of ECOSOC and its mandate at its creation. Although this piece is quite dated it presents an accurate overview of the role and functions of ECOSOC and can be used as a tool to understand the original function of the council, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of this UN body. It also notes the structure of ECOSOC, as well as outlining the basis for the use of various ad hoc committees and commissions in order to adequately fulfill its mandate.

Hurrell, A. (2009). *On Global Order: Power, Values, and the Constitution of International Society*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hurrell's book provides an assessment of the world's power struggles, while highlighting the major organizations and issues that are currently being addressed in the international arena. More specifically, this text analyzes the governing structure of the international system, including the major players, as well as

²⁹ Forsythe, *Human Rights in International Relations*, 2006, p.18.

³⁰ IGLHRC, *United Nations Grants Official Status to U.S.-based International LGBT Rights Group*, 2010.

³¹ Baylis & Smith, *The Globalization of World Politics: Introduction to International Relations*, 2005, p.421.

describes the major constraints in dealing with human rights violations and the promotion of democracy throughout the international system.

Karns, M. & Mingst, K. (2004). *International Organizations: The politics and Processes of Global Governance*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Karns and Mingst provide a detailed account of the major international organizations, including the United Nations. Within this section of the book, there is a segment dedicated to ECOSOC as well as an in depth analysis of the history of the United Nations. ECOSOC is assessed in detail and its major components are discussed and elaborated upon throughout this section, providing a comprehensive overview of the functions and roles of ECOSOC.

NGO Branch, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2011). *Introduction to ECOSOC Consultative Status*. Retrieved August 24, 2011 from <http://csonet.org/>

The NGO Branch website provides a detailed description and list of the NGOs which have been granted consultative status within ECOSOC. It outlines a comprehensive description of the process and function of the NGOs and allows one to note the possible avenues of interest of these various organizations. Considering the important role of NGOs within the ECOSOC, it is essential to understand the role these organizations play in the study of economic and social matters.

Shestack, J., Schachter, O. & Kennedy, P. (1995, April). The Charter's Origins in Today's Perspective. *American Society of International Law*, 89: 45-52.

Shestack, Schachter and Kennedy's book presents a comprehensive overview of the UN Charter and its effect on the current UN system. An assessment of ECOSOC's foundation as well as its functions and mandate are detailed, so as to better understand what the council can accomplish, while also assessing the limitations of the current system and the possible reforms that could be implemented in the future. As a historical overview of the UN system, this book provides a good foundation and structure to begin one's research into the complexities of ECOSOC.

United Nations. (2011). *United Nations Economic & Social Council*. Retrieved August 26, 2011 from <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/index.shtml>

ECOSOC's website presents a broad overview of the committee's history, key functions, as well as the current work being done for the 2011 term. Many of ECOSOC's greatest accomplishments are highlighted and linked to the UN documents citing the major resolutions or reports concerned. In addition, the major reforms undergone within ECOSOC are outlined and the major policy areas that have been assessed, and those currently being evaluated, are presented. In addition, a list of the subsidiary bodies is presented and allows one to access the individual Web sites corresponding to each body.