Summary of the General Assembly debate on the Secretary-General’s report entitled
Recommendations contained in the report of the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide
Coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment
16-17 April 2007

1. The General Assembly convened on 16-17 April 2006 for the launch of the Secretary-General’s report presenting his views on the recommendations in the report of the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment.

2. In opening the session the President of the General Assembly said that a more effective and coherent UN system that could better deliver on its promises to the world was in the interest of all Member States. The UN was uniquely placed to take a leading role towards achieving the MDGs and the report of the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence, Delivering as One (A/61/583), presented an important opportunity for the UN to do so. Both donors and developing countries agreed that the UN system had a critical role to play and should remain at the heart of the multilateral development system, that the UN system’s development activities need to be strengthened and that the UN system was in a position to deliver more and better development assistance. The President of the General Assembly stressed that constructive and collective efforts were required of both the UN system and Member States in moving ahead with the coherence agenda. She looked forward to in-depth intergovernmental consultations and appealed to Member States to work together to build broad consensus.

3. The Secretary-General stated that it was widely agreed that the UN could perform better, noting that the UN was seen as fragmented and weak at the country level and as lacking synergy and a clear collaborative framework at the global level. The Secretary-General was of the view that the High-level Panel report had produced thought-provoking and far reaching proposals to address these shortcomings. He expressed broad support for the principle of a stronger, more coherent UN and for the recommendations in the High-level Panel report, which he was convinced should be placed firmly within the context of the wider UN reform agenda. He stated that his own report, Recommendations contained in the report of the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment (A/61/836), outlined the steps taken to initiate the eight “One UN” country pilot projects and described the progress on transforming the CEB into a more effective and transparent mechanism for high-level
coordination and consultation. His report further supported replacing the current UN gender structures with one dynamic entity, focused on gender equality and women’s empowerment, to mobilize forces of change at the global level and inspire enhanced results at the country level. The Secretary-General believed that the High-level Panel recommendations on governance constituted a good starting point for in-depth inter-governmental review. He noted that he had requested the Deputy-Secretary-General to oversee the system-wide coherence agenda and ensure that the UN system’s initiatives to act on the High-level Panel recommendations were closely coordinated with the inter-governmental consideration of the High-level Panel report. He was of the opinion that moving forward on system-wide coherence was a win-win-win solution. It was a win for developing countries who stand to gain more coherent assistance and better service delivery, for developed countries who would be able to explain and justify to their constituents why it is right to channel resources through the UN and demonstrate real results, as well as for the UN itself by putting the house in better and enduring order. In concluding, he underlined that the stakes were high and a matter of life and death for millions around the world who depended on the UN to meet their basic human needs.

4. Twenty-eight Member States, and one Observer State, delivered statements during the debate that followed the Secretary-Generals presentation. Canada spoke on behalf of CANZ – Canada, Australia and New Zealand; Germany on behalf of the European Union; Pakistan on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the Non-Aligned Movement; Papua New Guinea on behalf of the Pacific Forum Small Islands Development States Group; and Rwanda on behalf of Belgium, Cap Verde, Denmark, Eritrea, Rwanda, Sweden and Tanzania. While in relevant cases aligning themselves with the statements of the regional groups above, Bangladesh, Belarus, Benin, Chile, China, Colombia, Ethiopia, France, Iceland, India, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, the People’s Democratic Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Solomon Islands, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Uruguay and Vietnam also delivered individual statements. As the sole Observer State to speak, the Holy See, moreover delivered a statement of its own.

5. Member States thanked the Secretary-General for his report, for his broad support of the High-level Panel’s recommendations and for his practical and actionable proposals to ensure that the intergovernmental fora is fully engaged in the follow-up process. They provided general support for the main recommendations and thrust of the Panel’s report – the emphasis on making the UN system more results-based, efficient and accountable being especially welcomed. Member States considered the Panel’s report to merit review and dialogue to build broad-based common understanding of its objectives, contents and proposals.

6. It was stressed that UN development cooperation should be responsive to the specific needs, priorities and conditions of each country, that there must be ownership by the recipient country of UN programmes and that there should be no “one size-fits all” approach. Some Member States further underscored that no new conditionalities should be introduced. General support was expressed for the “Delivering as one” concept of one leader, one programme, one budget and, where appropriate, one office. It was believed that the eight “One UN” pilot programmes would provide a valuable venue to test the application of this principle and that the lessons from the pilots would play a part in informing other reform efforts. The Panel’s recommendation of setting a clear accountability framework for the UN Resident Coordinator was, moreover, viewed as being important. Supported was also expressed for the proposed reform of UN business practices aimed at a more professional and efficient organization.
7. The view was expressed that reform of UN operational activities for development should aim at ensuring both efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of assistance, but should not be a mere cost-cutting exercise. As the fragmentation of the UN system was often seen as stemming from unpredictable funding, the importance of ensuring that adequate resources were available for the UN’s operational activities was underscored.

8. Member States generally welcomed the High-level Panel’s recommendation to strengthen the UN’s capacity to deliver on gender equality and women’s empowerment. It was expected that the implementation of the proposal on the creation of a post of Under Secretary General, to lead the consolidated gender architecture, would strengthen efforts to achieve the goals of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

9. Some Member States called for urgent action as regards the environment. The High-level Panel’s call for enhanced environmental governance, further coordination among the relevant UN agencies in the field of environment and the upgrade of UNEP was welcomed by them. The Panel’s recommendations on humanitarian assistance were, moreover, broadly supported and it was felt that the UN’s role in addressing humanitarian assistance must be enhanced to improve the collective response to meeting the needs of the victims of humanitarian crises.

10. With respect to the High-level Panel’s institutional proposals, the need for a broad consensus before moving ahead was raised, for example in the case of the establishment of the Sustainable Development Board. It was, in this regard, pointed out that the recommendation to establish an independent task force to further eliminate duplication, while in itself welcomed, could be seen as duplicating the mandate review as called for by the 2005 World Summit.

11. Differences in opinions were expressed as regards the interrelationships between the Panel’s recommendations – some Member States were of the view that the recommendations should be reviewed as an integrated whole while others were of the view that the recommendations did not come as a package and that each recommendation should be considered separately and on the basis of its own merit.

12. Member States reiterated that the ultimate objective of UN system-wide coherence should be to find the most effective means of delivering services to communities and people in need. They looked forward to an in-depth review of High-level Panel’s recommendations in order to improve the United Nation’s ability to help countries achieve the MDGs and other IADGs. The current debate was seen as the beginning of such a consultative process. Member States undertook to participate actively in the upcoming negotiations and welcomed the Secretary-General’s decision to appoint the Deputy-Secretary General to lead the efforts on implementing the system-wide coherence agenda.

13. The President of the General Assembly thanked all speakers for their contributions to the launch of the formal consultative process on the Secretary-General’s and High-level Panel’s reports. She would revert to Member States on how to best move the process forward. She appealed to all Member States to work constructively together and to be pragmatic and flexible in their approach so that a conclusion to the consultations could be reached within a reasonable timeframe.