Report of the High-Level Committee on Programmes at its intersessional meeting

(Frascati, 31 May to 1 June 2004)

1. The High-Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) held its intersessional meeting in Frascati, Rome, on 31 May and 1 June 2004.

I. Preparations for the 2005 comprehensive review of the implementation of the Millennium Declaration

2. In opening the discussion on the above subject, the representative of the United Nations briefed the Committee on resolution 58/291, adopted on 6 May 2004 by the General Assembly, confirming the holding of a major event (referred to in the resolution as a “high-level plenary meeting”) to undertake the first comprehensive review of the implementation of the Millennium Declaration; outlining the scope of the event; and launching a process of open-ended consultations to be carried out by the President of the General Assembly on “suggested modalities, format and organization” of the event. The most significant aspect of the resolution relates to the definition of the scope of the event, which is to cover comprehensively all aspects of the Millennium Declaration and to integrate in the review the broader issue of the review of the follow-up to the outcomes of other major conferences and summits. In the resolution, the Assembly decided to undertake “a comprehensive review of the progress made in the fulfilment of all the commitments contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, including the internationally agreed development goals and the global partnership required for their achievement, and of the progress made in the integrated and coordinated implementation, at the national, regional and international levels, of the outcomes and commitments of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields”.

3. The resolution also called for two reports by the Secretary-General: one, which was to be submitted to the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly, would be basically procedural, drawing on the consultations to be carried out by the President of the General Assembly; and a substantive report, which was for consideration at the high-level plenary meeting in 2005. With regard to the latter report, the intention, for the moment, was to model it after the concise, policy-oriented report submitted by the Secretary-General to the Millennium Summit four years ago
(A/54/2000) and to issue it in early spring, so as to maximize its impact on the substantive intergovernmental preparations for the event. Two major inputs for the report would be, in addition to recent policy discussions at CEB, in particular those relating to the future of multilateralism, the outcomes of the Millennium Project and of the Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Changes. Both of these exercises were to be completed by December 2004. The representative of the United Nations suggested that, under the circumstances, consideration should be given to an earlier timetable for the completion of the CEB “accountability” report on the system’s experience with the implementation of the Millennium Declaration, under preparation in HLCP. It should not be impossible for HLCP to complete this work by its session in September 2004 and for CEB to review and finalize the report at its fall session, with a view to its issuance by the end of the year. This would serve to enhance its usefulness as an input in the finalization of the Secretary-General’s main report. This would be without prejudice to its issuance as a distinct publication during the course of 2005, if CEB deems it desirable. Indeed, given the intention that the Secretary-General’s main report should be both comprehensive and concise, special publications during 2005, relevant to the different aspects of the review, may well prove necessary.

4. The representative of UNDP briefed the Committee on the work of the Millennium Project, noting that a synthesis report of the work of the individual task forces was expected at the end of June 2004. Early findings indicated that all aspects of the Millennium Declaration were interlinked and that it would be difficult to make specific recommendations for one area without considering their impact on all other areas. Given the interconnections, it was proving difficult for the participants in the Millennium Project to set an overall figure to “cost” the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals; nevertheless, they were able to discern a very close interaction between national policies and changes leading to specific results. He added that a Technical Support Centre for the Millennium Development Goals had been set up by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in Kenya, and that it would be undertaking a series of studies in some six or seven pilot countries.

5. Commenting on General Assembly resolution 58/291 and the President’s ongoing consultations on the organization of the 2005 event, the representative of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs noted that perhaps the two most complex aspects of the exercise had to do with the way linkages between the political and development aspects of the Declaration and between the follow-up to the Declaration and conference follow-up processes should be approached. Another difficult issue was the link to other General Assembly events in 2005, including the high-level dialogue on financing for development as well as the review of follow-up to the special session on HIV/AIDS. In the meantime, for its part, the Economic and Social Council was expected to take up, at its high-level segment in 2005, its contribution to the 2005 review, including interlinkages between peace and security and development.

6. The Chairman noted that Member States appeared to be reinforcing the message that there was a need for a coordinated response from the country and the global levels. The contribution of CEB would be the only one that would bring together an overview of the work of the entire United Nations system at both levels. He thanked the Task Group for the work it had prepared for the consideration of the
Committee and invited its Convener to introduce the working paper (CEB/2004/HLCP/I-S/CRP.1).

7. The Convener of the Task Group noted that the small team involved in preparing the draft before the Committee had met in mid-May in Washington, D.C. to finalize the submissions that had been received to date. The paper was very much a work in progress and should serve as a basis for further refinement by the Committee. The working groups that would be convened during the intersessional meeting should help identify the gaps and articulate the key messages to be highlighted in the report, particularly in its conclusions. In addition, she requested members to focus on articulating the key facilitating factors that have marked the success of the system, as well as the constraints that have impeded its work. Illustrations could be given in boxed text focusing on cross-cutting themes, such as partnerships, gender equality, indigenous people and HIV/AIDS. In addition, more work was needed in articulating the linkages between the normative work of the system and its operational role.

8. During the discussion that ensued, a number of observations were made. First, the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals were a powerful, universally accepted framework for inspiring action by all stakeholders, both within and outside the United Nations system. Second, it was noted that the greatest changes since 2000 had taken place in the area of peace and security. The CEB report needed to highlight what the United Nations system was doing at the country level to support the political processes by the United Nations through operational activities, as well as to highlight the linkages between peace and security, development, the environment and human rights and governance. A number of cross-cutting issues, such as HIV/AIDS, cultural diversity and biodiversity, could also be seen through this perspective. More broadly, the report needed to provide a clear vision of the present and future role of the United Nations system in assisting Member States in their implementation of the Millennium Declaration and to articulate the system’s operational niche at the normative and standard-setting level as well as its role in terms of advocacy. The point was also made that the United Nations system need not be viewed monolithically, but rather as a series of partnerships among agencies and between agencies and outside actors in various spheres. Others mentioned the need to highlight the work of CEB and HLCP, including with regard to the “triple crisis” initiative, and to stress the importance of knowledge-sharing in meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

9. Following an initial discussion, three smaller groups were formed to discuss the structure and messages for the report more specifically. The Committee decided to proceed with a redrafting of the report based on an outline containing the following elements: (a) the Millennium Declaration five years later; (b) a changing environment; (c) the role of the United Nations system; and (d) recommendations. It was further decided to circulate the new draft for comments by 5 July and to hold a consultation in the margins of the Economic and Social Council in New York. A revised text would then be completed for submission to HLCP in September and finalization by CEB in October 2004. Additional inputs by agencies should be sent to the Convener of the Task Force, with copies to the CEB secretariat.

10. Under this item, the Chairman also invited Professor Hans Rosling of the Karolinska Institute to present a software package to the Committee related to the
monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals. The Committee found the presentation to be most useful and thanked Professor Rosling for his interest in working collaboratively on the project with organizations of the United Nations system.

II. Bridging the digital divide

11. In introducing the item, the Chairman noted that two papers before the Committee were relevant in the preparations for CEB’s second regular session of 2004. They reflected distinct but related processes. The first contained the draft terms of reference for the ICT Network’s working group on a comprehensive ICT strategy for the United Nations system (CEB/2004/HLCP/I-S/CRP.2). The second paper, entitled “Building the information society: implications for the United Nations system” (CEB/2004/HLCP/I-S/CRP.2/Add.1), was prepared by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the secretariat of the World Summit on the Information Society and was part of the High-level Summit Organizing Committee (HLSOC) processes relating to the follow-up to the first phase and preparations for the second phase of the Summit.

12. The representative of ITU noted that efforts to bridge the digital divide were an element in the overarching concept of an information society. Once access was achieved, a wide range of other considerations would come into play, revolving around the use of e-applications to improve social and economic conditions. The challenge of building an information society would require a coordinated approach to achieve meaningful progress. The implementation of the Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action adopted at the Geneva phase of the World Summit on the Information Society should be part of a multi-tiered approach to the issue of the information society and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

13. He reported on preparations for the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, which was scheduled to be held from 16 to 18 November 2005 in Tunis. The second phase would give fresh impetus to efforts to find solutions to particular problems, such as Internet governance and financing mechanisms, as well as monitor the implementation of the outcome of the Geneva phase of the Summit. HLSOC, which was already engaged in a stock-taking exercise to assess the current level of programmatic activity within the United Nations system that touched on the information society and to provide information on new activities aimed at meeting the goals set by the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, would meet later in June in Tunisia.

14. He hoped that agencies would add to section 2 of the paper, which touched on access and infrastructure, and provide additional information and guidance with respect to section 3, which linked the information society to the Millennium Declaration. He also drew attention to the set of recommendations in section 4 of the paper. Any views that HLCP might have on the paper would be welcome.

15. He suggested that the encompassing and multidisciplinary nature of the emerging information society called for a set of differentiated approaches by the United Nations system. A programmatic approach needed to be refined and considered. Each agency had been asked to review its mandate to determine whether and how its current activities impacted on the digital divide. The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) needed to be mainstreamed into the
development agenda and into action that addressed a wide range of social, economic and political objectives. Linkages needed to be established between and among the various e-applications of agencies in order to ensure a shared vision of the information society. A structural approach was required; although aspects of the digital divide touched on the mandates of many institutions, there was no central entity within the United Nations system to coordinate a response to this challenge.

16. The representative of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs introduced the terms of reference for the ICT Network’s working group, which was expected to elaborate elements for an e-strategy for the United Nations system, as called for in General Assembly resolution 57/295. One of the key elements for such a strategy would be the question of how to bridge the digital divide. The Group was expected to complete its work by the end of July and its report available by the time of the HLCP’s session in September.

17. He underscored the critical importance of ICT as an enabler in achieving the development agenda and stated that, in order to convince policy makers of its importance, more analytical work was needed to show how it has been used to achieve results in developing countries. Another challenge was to bring about links between development policies at the national level and ICT; at present the United Nations system country-level development framework instruments such as the poverty reduction strategy papers, the common country assessments and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework did not take ICT into account. There was also a need to elaborate a “law of cyberspace”; while some work had been done, norms and standards in this area were less developed than in other aspects of the work of the United Nations system. Finally, the United Nations system needed to look at how ICT could transform its work in such areas as procurement, communications and knowledge-sharing and contribute towards the building of an information society.

18. The representative of the United Nations, Secretary of CEB, noted that both papers before the Committee contained useful information and insights, which should be drawn upon by the CEB secretariat and HLCP in orienting and focusing CEB’s discussions in the fall. While hopefully contributing also to the second phase of the Summit, the CEB discussion should be approached on its own merit: a brief executive note should be prepared for this purpose by the CEB secretariat, focusing on a few dimensions of the issue on which CEB could reach some specific conclusions to advance the coherence of the work of the United Nations system.

19. The Director of the CEB secretariat noted that although the issue of ICT was cross-cutting, it had so far been dealt with within the CEB system more as a management than a programmatic issue, and had thus been on the HLCM agenda in the context, inter alia, of administration and procurement. The report of the ICT Network, forwarding the outcome of the working group on e-strategy and the issue of bridging the digital divide, would be submitted both to the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) and HLCP. In response to a question, he explained that the ICT Network, the successor to the Information Systems Coordination Committee (ISCC), was an inter-agency mechanism for ensuring coordination in the ICT area among organizations of the United Nations system. He added that the ICT task force was an advisory group established by the Secretary-General following a request by the Economic and Social Council, with representation from Governments, the private sector and civil society. The task force
had as its goal to lend a global dimension to the efforts to bridge the digital divide, foster digital opportunity and put ICT at the service of development. As to HLSOC, it was established to prepare for World Summit on the Information Society. Although the three bodies had different histories and mandates, there was still a need for their work to be integrated, through HLCP, in order to further the aims of preparing both elements for an e-strategy for the system and a framework approach for bridging the digital divide.

20. In the discussion that followed, the Chairman observed that there were unprecedented opportunities for information-sharing among the organizations of the United Nations system. While many of the immediate technical tasks were being tackled by the various agencies, CEB needed to look at the medium and longer-term strategic aspects of ICT and determine how best to capitalize on the new opportunities offered by the emergence of the information society. The title of the agenda item for CEB, which now referred primarily to the “digital divide”, should be recast in this broader perspective.

21. Points raised relevant to the content of the paper to be presented to CEB included the following:

(a) It is important, in looking at digital opportunities, to be as pragmatic as possible: use and access to ICT, not just the hardware, need to be addressed;

(b) There should be a system-wide policy on the use of open source software, which would be of particular benefit to developing countries;

(c) Innovative technology that can be used by planners across sectors, such as the Geographic Information Systems and mapping, should be highlighted;

(d) An advocacy role for the system should be advanced, particularly vis-à-vis policies that restrict access to the Internet;

(e) Both costs and benefits of ICT should be examined;

(f) CEB should look at where the ICT strategy should take the system and determine how the work of the system can best be coordinated;

(g) CEB should examine the human dimensions of ICT, impacting on knowledge-sharing for people, cultural diversity and education;

(h) The implementation of the WSIS Plan of Action adopted at the World Summit on the Information Society should be closely related to progress in following up the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals.

22. The Committee decided that the CEB secretariat should prepare a brief executive note taking into account the paper being prepared by ITU through the HLSOC process as well as the document being developed under the direction of the ICT Network. The note should serve to focus the CEB discussion on a few key dimensions of the ICT/information society dialogue, on which CEB can reach conclusions that can serve to concretely advance the coherence and development impact of the system’s work. A draft of the note should be submitted to the September session of HLCP and revised/finalized by HLCP for submission to CEB.
III. Follow-up to the decisions of the High-Level Committee on Programmes

A. Curbing transnational crime

23. The representative of the Office on Drugs and Crime, in introducing the note entitled, “Curbing transnational crime” (CEB/2004/HLCP/I-S/CRP.3), recalled that at its first regular session of 2004, CEB addressed the issue of curbing transnational crime and endorsed a number of measures aimed at building an effective system-wide response both in the short and medium term. To carry forward the implementation of the recommendations, CEB agreed that the Office on Drugs and Crime would take the lead in initiating a consultative process and coordinating ensuing actions, with the full involvement of the CEB mechanisms.

24. She noted that the strategic approach to implementing the measures was threefold: to gather information to assess various actions under way by United Nations organizations; to identify practical steps for joint action at both headquarters and field levels; and based on these results, to develop a United Nations system strategic response to transnational organized crime as a contribution to the Conference of Parties of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

25. The Office on Drugs and Crime envisaged its role in relation to the implementation of the CEB recommendations to have three components: to act as coordinator/clearing house for information on the activities of the United Nations system; to initiate or deepen operational links; and to determine an agreed upon timetable for the ongoing implementation of the measures, notably the development of the strategic response, to be periodically reviewed, including on the occasion of the Eleventh United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, scheduled to be held in Bangkok in April 2005.

26. As a first step, the Executive Director of the Office on Drugs and Crime requested the executive heads of concerned organizations to nominate focal points as members of task groups focusing on the four key areas requiring immediate attention: links between conflicts and organized crime; identification of collaborative actions against trafficking in human beings; trafficking of illicit commodities; and HIV/AIDS in prisons.

27. During the discussion, it was noted that the approach for developing the interagency approach to curbing transnational crime was exemplary. HLCP had elaborated the strategy for pursuing this issue, which was endorsed by CEB and translated for operation right away. The United Nations Development Group had revised its 2004 priority work programme to include organized crime and corruption as cross-cutting issues, which would also be addressed in an update to the guidelines to the common country assessment/United Nations Development Assistance Framework guidelines.

28. The Committee commended the work accomplished thus far. It was pointed out that the Office on Drugs and Crime, during its chairmanship of the Committee of Co-sponsoring Organizations of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) starting in July 2004, would be able to vigorously advance HIV/AIDS-related issues. It decided to monitor closely the implementation of the
CEB recommendations on an ongoing basis, with a progress report on the work of the task groups in September and a fuller consideration of the issue at its spring 2005 session.

B. Follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development

29. The Director of the CEB secretariat introduced the follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (CEB/2004/HLCP/I-S/CRP.3/Add.1), recalling that at its second regular session of 2003, CEB had endorsed HLCP’s recommendations regarding inter-agency collaborative arrangements in the areas of freshwater and water and sanitation, energy, oceans and coastal areas and changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production. This included its confirmation of UN Water, composed of United Nations organizations, specialized agencies, convention secretariats and regional commissions, as the inter-agency mechanism for follow-up to the water-related decisions of the Summit and the Millennium Development Goals; the establishment of an Oceans and Coastal Areas Network and the request for it to develop terms of reference and a work programme; the endorsement of the 10-year framework on changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production; as well as the approach taken by HLCP towards system-wide coordination on energy.

30. He recalled that at its meeting in Beirut, the Committee had decided to establish an ad hoc task force composed of experts on energy from the United Nations system and led by the Committee’s Vice-Chairman to elaborate terms of reference and a work programme for a system-wide collaborative arrangement on energy. This group had met in Rome on 14 and 15 April, and the terms of reference for UN Energy and a draft proposal containing a framework for its work programme had been included in its report. The ad hoc group had elected Mr. Mats Karlsson and Mr. Gustavo Best to serve, respectively, as Chairman and Vice-Chairman of UN Energy for 2004-2005. He added that the next meeting of UN Energy was tentatively scheduled to be held on 2 July in Paris.

31. He also recalled that at its meeting in Beirut, the Committee had already taken note of the terms of reference, membership, modalities of work and future work programme of the renamed UN Oceans.

32. As for UN Water, he drew attention to the outcome of the group’s recent meeting (Geneva, 11-13 May) which elaborated the terms of reference, functioning modalities and programme of work of the group now before the Committee.

33. In the ensuing discussion, the Committee reaffirmed the terms of reference for UN Oceans and asked it to keep HLCP fully informed of its work.

34. In regard to UN Energy, it was noted that the text before the Committee did not reflect changes already agreed upon by the ad hoc group. The text was thus updated and the terms of reference and proposed work programme of UN Energy, as revised, was endorsed. The Committee commended the ad hoc group on the work it had accomplished.

35. With respect to UN Water, a number of issues were raised regarding the document before the Committee. They related to different aspects of the terms of reference, the proposed working modalities, the work programme and secretariat support arrangements that the Committee asked to be reviewed from the point of
view of their consistency with the overall guidelines of CEB for the functioning of inter-agency networks, as well its specific conclusions concerning coordination requirements in the water area. Questions were also raised about the status of the document and the adequacy of the process of consultations leading to it. The Committee asked the CEB secretariat to arrange further consultations, involving members of both HLCP and UN Water, and expressed the hope that the matter would be brought to a closure as soon as possible.

IV. HLCP programme of work, 2004-2005 and beyond

36. In introducing the item, the Chairman recalled that, since 2000, the CEB work plan has been based on the Secretary-General’s road map for the implementation of the Millennium Declaration, which covered the period through 2004. At the end of 2004, a new framework for CEB’s work plan and the supporting work of HLCP would therefore be needed. Although HLCP was not expected to finalize its decisions regarding its future work programme at this intersessional meeting, it was not too early to start a dialogue, on the understanding that the matter would be treated in depth at the Committee’s meeting in September.

37. The representative of the United Nations said that the paper before the Committee, entitled “HLCP programme of work, 2004-2005 and beyond” (CEB/2004/HLCP/I-S/CRP.4), was not intended to cover the matter comprehensively or conclusively, but only to analyse the outcomes of CEB’s discussions on multilateralism and put forward tentative ideas on their implication for some of the elements of the framework that might guide the future work of CEB and HLCP.

38. In view of the relevance of the outcome of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization to the policy directions that should guide future inter-agency work, the representative of the International Labour Organization (ILO) was invited to brief the Committee, under this agenda item, on the first meeting of the policy coherence initiative, which had recently taken place in Geneva with the participation of nine agencies. In doing so, he drew attention to the congruence between the initiative and the suggestion in the Secretariat’s paper that CEB might launch a series of policy-oriented system-wide research projects focused on key priority issues and their linkages. He noted that the Director-General of ILO, Mr. Juan Somavia, had underscored that participation in the group was voluntary, that it would relate closely to both CEB and HLCP and was not in any way intended to bypass the governing bodies of the concerned agencies. The topics which the initiative could cover ranged from international economic and financial policy to the contribution of social policies and institutions to growth, investment and employment and how the contribution of employment creation to poverty reduction could be increased in the poverty reduction strategy paper process. The group recognized that insufficient attention had been paid to employment within the context of the Millennium Development Goals thus far; in addition there was agreement on the importance of integrating the informal economy into the economic mainstream. Differing views were expressed on the extent to which current macroeconomic policies needed to be re-examined in order to improve employment outcomes. The interdependence between labour market institutions, social policies, the investment climate and economic performance was recognized as providing a suitable framework for pursuing further the set of issues under consideration. The
meeting concluded with an agreement that the various issues would be examined in
greater depth by the relevant experts in the agencies and that over the next few
months a more substantial basis for an in-depth consultation would be developed,
perhaps in the form of a paper, for the next meeting on the initiative.

39. During the discussion, different issues were identified as needing attention in
HLCP’s future programme of work. These included: knowledge-sharing, gender
mainstreaming; culture and development; migration; human security; trade; and
youth employment. While these were not new issues, they all, in different ways,
called for new approaches to address them and increase impact. The Committee
decided to revert to a fuller discussion of its future work programme at its
meeting in September.

V. Other matters

40. The representative of UNCTAD briefed the Committee on preparations for its
eleventh session, to be held in Sao Paolo from 13 to 18 June 2004, which would be
focused on the theme of enhancing the coherence between national development
strategies and global economic processes towards economic growth and
development, particularly in developing countries. The Conference would focus on
three cross-cutting issues: trade and poverty; trade and gender; and trade and the
creative industries. Debates would focus on ways to make trade work for
development, bearing in mind the outcomes of the recent summits on financing for
development and sustainable development. Emphasis would be on improving
competitiveness and building capacity in the productive sector.

41. The Committee thanked UNICEF for its offer to host the next meeting of
HLCP, which was scheduled to be held in Florence, from 15 to 17 September 2004.
Annex I

Agenda

1. Adoption of the agenda.
2. Preparations for the 2005 comprehensive review of the implementation of the Millennium Declaration.
3. Bridging the digital divide.
4. Follow-up to the decisions of the High-Level Committee on Programmes:
   (a) Curbing transnational crime;
   (b) Follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development.
6. Other matters.
Annex II

List of participants

Chairman:
Lennart Båge
(International Fund for Agricultural Development)

Secretary:
Phyllis Lee
(Secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination)

United Nations
Patrizio Civili
Sarbuland Khan
Francesca Perucci

International Labour Organization
Eddie Lee

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Wendy Mann
Eckhard Hein
Jose-Luis Fernandez

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
Jean-Yves Le Saux

World Health Organization
Peter Joseph Mertens
Jacqueline Toupin

World Bank
Clare Fleming

International Monetary Fund
Reinhard Munzberg

International Telecommunication Union
Arthur Levin

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United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
Dan Deac

United Nations Development Programme
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Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Marjon Kamara
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United Nations Children’s Fund
Ado Vaher
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United Nations Population Fund
Mari Simonen

World Food Programme
Allan Jury

United Nations International Drug Control Programme
Nasra Hassan

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Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization
Bernard Wrabetz

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
Mukhul Sanwal

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
Werasit Sittitrai

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Secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination
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