Summary

The present report is prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 57/270 B of 23 June 2003, in which the Assembly requested each functional commission to examine its methods of work in order to better pursue implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits on the basis of a report with recommendations to be submitted by the Secretary-General to each functional commission. At its forty-second session, in February 2004, the Commission for Social Development had before it the report of the Secretary-General on the review of the methods of work of the Commission (E/CN.5/2004/2). After an exchange of views, the Commission decided to continue consideration of the issue at its forty-third session. The present report provides a summary of the discussion that took place last year and puts forward a number of recommendations for further improving the methods of work of the Commission, for consideration by the Economic and Social Council, through the Commission for Social Development.
I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 57/270 B of 23 June 2003, requested each functional commission to examine its methods of work in order to better pursue the implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits, recognizing that there was no need for a uniform approach since each functional commission had its own specificity. In the same resolution, the Secretary-General was requested to submit a report with recommendations to each functional commission. The functional commissions and other relevant bodies of the Economic and Social Council were in turn requested to report to the Council no later than 2005 on the outcome of that examination.

2. At its forty-second session in February 2004, the Commission for Social Development considered the report of the Secretary-General on the review of its methods of work (E/CN.5/2004/2). The Commission held an exchange of views on the subject and adopted decision 42/101, in which it took note of the report and the views expressed by delegations and decided to continue consideration of the issue at its forty-third session. The present report, prepared in response to that decision, provides an update to the report of the Secretary-General submitted to the Commission at its last session.

II. Summary of discussion at the forty-second session

3. At the forty-second session of the Commission for Social Development, there was agreement that the work of the Commission should be strengthened and its effectiveness enhanced in order to better respond to its mandates. The role of the Commission as the primary intergovernmental body responsible for the follow-up to the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly was recognized and reaffirmed.

4. While there was agreement that more focused outcomes on the Commission’s priority themes would be useful, there were differing views regarding whether these outcomes should, after adoption by the Commission, be considered by both the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, or only by the Council.

5. Support was given to the recommendations for a biennial programme of work. The approach adopted by the Commission for Sustainable Development was cited. While flexibility as well as a rolling plan was advocated, the Commission agreed that a more extensive review would be needed before a final decision was taken on this subject.

6. The Commission welcomed a more active participation and involvement of the United Nations funds and programmes and other entities of the United Nations system, as these bodies had a great contribution to make to the implementation of the Copenhagen agenda. The Commission cautioned, however, that the specific normative role of the Commission, as an intergovernmental body of the United Nations, should not be forgotten or diluted.

7. The active participation of the regional commissions of the United Nations in the review to be undertaken by the Commission in 2005 was welcomed, although the view was expressed that care should be taken that the regional commissions provide assistance to the central bodies and refrain from re-negotiating or re-
interpreting texts adopted by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.

8. Different views were expressed on the merits of a “lateral” coordination between the Commission and other functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council. The opinion was voiced that formal contacts between these commissions would create unnecessary overlap and duplication and that coordination should therefore be left to the Council. The view that an exchange of information was useful, provided due notice was taken of the specificity of the mandates of each functional commission, was also expressed. With the same proviso as to the specificity of mandates, it was stated that cooperation and coordination between secretariats and bureaux should be encouraged in order to enhance the implementation of the Copenhagen agenda and the outcome of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly.

9. The Commission strongly supported the active and meaningful participation of all relevant actors in the work of the Commission, in particular when it considers its priority theme in 2005, which would raise its profile and enhance its relevance. It was recalled, however, that the Commission was and should remain an intergovernmental body.

10. A focus of the work of the Commission for its 2005 review on important measures, new challenges and emerging issues was generally supported. It was emphasized that the Commission had a specific responsibility for the 10-year review of the World Summit for Social Development. Support was also expressed for maintaining the emerging issues item on the Commission’s future agenda, although it was felt that the procedure for selecting such issues should be clarified.

11. The introduction of interactive debates with panels of experts in the work of the Commission was considered a major improvement. The debates had opened the Commission to a wide array of views and provided expertise on the various aspects of social development that fall within its mandate. It was also pointed out that the equal and effective delivery of the outcomes of the work of the Commission was enhanced by the in-depth exchange of information, experience and good practice by relevant actors and experts.

12. With regard to the contribution that the Commission would make to the special event on the five-year review of the Millennium Declaration, it was noted that negotiations on this event were still ongoing.

III. Recommendations

13. Taking into account the views expressed on reviewing the methods of work of the Commission during its forty-second session, the following recommendations are put forward for consideration by the Economic and Social Council through the Commission for Social Development:

(a) The Commission may wish to reiterate the importance of ensuring the participation of high-level representatives of the field of social development in its work;

(b) The outcomes on the priority themes of the Commission should be more focused, containing new elements and valuable policy recommendations.
Most importantly, the format of these outcomes, expressing the considered views of the Commission, should help to enhance the relevance of the work of the Commission and facilitate its consideration by other intergovernmental bodies and national authorities;

(c) After its current five-year multiyear programme of work (2002-2006), the Commission may wish to consider adopting a biennial programme of work, taking into account an integrated treatment of the various items in its future agendas, including those related to the situation of social groups. It was noted that an integrated biennial programme of work does not preclude the possibility of pursuing work on the three core issues of the World Summit for Social Development: eradication of poverty; promoting full employment; and enhancing social integration in a stable, safe and just society. This would also be possible if the Commission for Social Development were to adopt the methods of work of the Commission for Sustainable Development. If, for example, the theme of social integration was to be chosen, the first year of the biennium would be devoted to an examination of relevant international and national policies and the second year to a review of the implementation of such policies;

(d) Related to the above recommendation, and taking into account its 10-year review of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, the Commission may wish to include in its future agendas an item on new challenges and emerging issues, among which could be issues relevant to the mandate of the Commission, arising from the report of the World Commission on the Social Dimensions of Globalization;1

(e) Pursuant to resolution 57/270 B, the Commission may wish to encourage more active participation and involvement in its work by the regional commissions, funds and programmes, other entities of the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions. Similarly, the active and meaningful participation of all relevant actors in social development should continue to be facilitated. In this regard, interactive debates with panels and similar arrangements may provide useful forums;

(f) Cooperation and coordination between the substantive secretariats and bureaux of the Commission and the other functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council should be encouraged;

(g) Overall, the Commission should continue to identify ways and means to be a more effective forum for fostering cooperation, partnerships and solidarity in the pursuit of social development.

Notes