

The establishment of UNCTAD is part of a process which has gone on for many years within the UN system - the creation of a series of specialized expert bodies set up to address themselves directly and expressly to those economic and social problems which seem susceptible of international solution. Starting with the Functional Commissions, we have elaborated and refined this network within the United Nations itself to include the governing bodies of the specialized assistance programmes, the Committee for Industrial Development, the Advisory Committee on Science and Technology and now - the boldest gesture to date - UNCTAD. En route, we have made periodic changes in an effort to bring this burgeoning network into some sort of logical order; the Council has recommended the merger of TAC and the Governing Council of the Special Fund into one Governing Council for a unified United Nations Development Programme; the Commission on International Commodity Trade recently died a graceful and essential death, its functions taken over by UNCTAD.

We have seen, moreover, the development of what has been called the United Nations "family of organizations" - the Specialized Agencies, which have in recent years been drawn increasingly closer to the work of the United Nations itself, to the point where we might change our terminology to speak in future of the United Nations common system of organizations.

All these developments - with their common theme of increasing specialization - have reflected the changing needs of a changing world. It would be surprising if these changes did not signal the need for comparable changes in the role of ECOSOC itself. It would also be surprising if the founders of the United Nations, who endowed ECOSOC with its functions, had been able to see in any detail the role the United Nations would be required to play in economic and social matters 20 years later. In that 20 years, we have seen the urgent need for an assault on economic and social development emerge as the priority claim on the attention of ECOSOC and all the bodies which come within its orbit. The reasoned debate on emerging trends in the economic and social fields has been supplanted by the more urgent need to act. This is not to say that debate has become unnecessary, but rather to suggest that it must always be regarded as a prelude to action, to result, the debate which precedes it must necessarily be precise, informed and specialized - hence the establishment of specialized bodies.

As each specialized body has emerged, the Council has been able (or should have been able) to withdraw from what might be called the action debate in that particular field. The responsibilities for detailed action have been delegated to experts. This process has achieved a new level with UNCTAD; it would be absurd for 27 representatives to sit in these halls debating in all solemnity the trade requirements of the developing countries when a better qualified and larger body had made these needs its special concern. It should be with something very like a sigh of gratitude that ECOSOC hands over its detailed responsibilities in this field. The picture in other areas is no different. This Council has neither the time nor the necessary expertise to wrestle with the detailed planning required to make social development or international acceptance of human rights a working reality.