Secretary General’s report presents a thorough analysis of where the UN system stands in the context of cooperation with middle-income countries. It is gratifying to see the rising interest to the topic throughout 2013. In June, Costa-Rica hosted a major international conference, which ended with the adoption of the Declaration of San-Jose. Likewise, several relevant regional events have taken place, including the regional conference titled “The Middle-Income Countries’ Perspective on Sustainable Development in CIS, Eastern and Southern Europe”, held last May in the capital of Belarus, Minsk.

All these events drew attention to the need for the UN system’s organizations and agencies to continue assisting the group of middle-income countries. Indeed, almost two thirds of the poor people in the world live in this group. Therefore, the overall success with the achievement of the Development Goals set forth in the Millennium Declaration will be generally measured by the degree of success attained exactly by middle-income countries. Besides, by analogy with the intrastate context, where the presence and stability of a sizeable middle-class is an indicator of national stability, the steady and sustained development of the group of middle-income countries is an indicator of stability in the whole world.

A serious challenge to middle-income countries stems from the rising level of domestic income inequality. Although this problem is typical for the group as a whole, there are certain exceptions. For instance, Belarus, which has a very low level of internal income inequality, is of them. In general, the rising level of inequality in middle-income countries was caused by uneven globalization, whereby separate regions in some of them, mainly export-oriented territories, develop very successfully, whereas other parts fall significantly behind in economic development. The growing inequality, in turn, serves to increase poverty.

Furthermore, middle-income countries turned out to be extremely vulnerable to external factors. For example, as a result of the recent global economic and financial crisis, middle-income countries have experienced a substantial drop in exports and foreign investments and loans, which serve only to entrench their debt burden. The vulnerability of this group has been borne out by the fact that membership of some MICs in regional economic blocks was not enough to shield them from serious economic setbacks.

All the above factors point to the need for the UN system to provide comprehensive assistance to middle-income countries. In recent years, UN system’s organizations and agencies
have been striving to increase attention to the needs of the MIC group. The UNFPA has advanced most in this regard. At the same time, in our view, there is no yet visible systemic and consistent approach on the part of the UN system when it comes to cooperation with middle-income countries. This point, by the way, has been made crystal clear in the Secretary-Generals’ report.

We believe that the way to address this problem is through a comprehensive UN Plan of Action on cooperation with middle-income countries, as the Declaration of San-Jose urges us to do. Notwithstanding, the prospects of bringing the idea to fruition, as it appears to us, are very much about whether UN Member States find agreement on what such a Plan should contain.

Belarus thinks that the Plan must focus, first and foremost, on ways to strengthen inter-agency coordination with regard to UN system’s cooperation with middle-income countries. What is most needed is to set clear guidelines on how the UN system should interact with such a heterogeneous group as middle-income countries. This message has been made loud and clear at the regional conference in Belarus.

As the Secretary-General’s report notes, the implementation of the idea of an Inter-Agency Plan of Action would be the least costly among other possible options.

We believe that all of us can make a significant step forward on the issue in the context of the draft resolution on “Development Cooperation with Middle-Income Countries”.