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**ESCAP REFORM: FOLLOW-UP TO COMMISSION RESOLUTION 53/1 ON
RESTRUCTURING THE CONFERENCE STRUCTURE
OF THE COMMISSION**

(Item 5 (a) of the provisional agenda)

**FOLLOW-UP TO COMMISSION RESOLUTION 53/1 ON RESTRUCTURING
THE CONFERENCE STRUCTURE OF THE COMMISSION**

Report of the Executive Secretary

SUMMARY

The present document provides a general description of the status of reform efforts being made at ESCAP pursuant to mandates given by the Commission in its resolution 53/1 of 30 April 1997 on restructuring the conference structure of the Commission.

The Commission has always been cognizant of the need to maximize the effectiveness of its conference structure, bearing in mind the dynamic nature of developments taking place in the Asian and Pacific region and the needs of the member States as expressed in various forums.

The present note is divided into three sections: what has been done, what is under way, and what is being contemplated.

A. What has been done

1. Within the context of the reform of the United Nations, ESCAP undertook major reforms in 1987 and 1992. In the 1992 reform initiative, the Commission decided, by resolution 48/2 of 23 April 1992 on restructuring the conference structure of the Commission, to adopt a thematic approach in its programme and conference structures. The resolution was subsequently endorsed by the Economic and Social Council. The following were some of the important elements of that initiative:

- The number of legislative committees was reduced to seven, consisting of three thematic committees, two technical committees and two special bodies
- The sessions of several bodies and committees were biennialized, and their work was streamlined through the adoption of more focused agendas and a reduction in the duration of their sessions from seven days to three days
- The number and length of documents of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies were reduced, and the format of the documents was revised to highlight areas for action
- The duration of the annual session of the Commission was reduced from 10 days to seven days, with the ministerial segment held on the last three days
- The number of subprogrammes was reduced from 15 to 6. Then in 1996, the number of subprogrammes in the medium-term plan of ESCAP was further disaggregated into 10 subprogrammes in line with the organizational and conference structure, so as to comply with the decision of the General Assembly that the programmatic and organizational structures of the secretariat should be congruent in order to strengthen the link between the plan and the programme budget

B. What is under way

2. By resolution 48/2, the Commission had mandated a comprehensive review of the reform process to be undertaken five years after the adoption of that resolution, i.e. in 1997. That review coincided with the United Nations review process undertaken by the Secretary-General. The exercise involved extensive consultations with the members and associate members of the Commission and the close involvement of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission (ACPR). It produced the following results:

(a) The Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Review of the Conference Structure of the Commission, held in February 1997, recommended that the thematic approach should be continued as an evolutionary process, and that the focus of the work of the Commission and its subsidiary

committees should be sharpened, thereby improving efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of the ESCAP programme of work. The Commission at its fifty-third session and the Economic and Social Council at its 1997 session endorsed the recommendations and decided to revise the conference structure. The new structure is shown in the following table:

Table 1. The revised conference structure of the Commission

Committees	Periodicity
Regional Economic Cooperation	Biennial
Socio-economic Measures to Alleviate Poverty in Rural and Urban Areas	Annual
Environment and Natural Resources Development	Annual
Transport, Communications, Tourism and Infrastructure Development	Annual
Statistics	Biennial
<u>Special bodies</u>	
Least Developed and Landlocked Developing Countries	Biennial
Pacific Island Developing Countries	Biennial

(b) Consideration by ACPR in October 1997 of a report on the preliminary assessment of the organizational, staffing and financial implications of the revision of the intergovernmental structure subsidiary to the Commission.

(c) Consultations with the members and associate members of the Commission, as well as with ACPR, on the programmes and priorities of the Commission.

(d) The secretariat's own internal reform efforts, including, among others, reorganization of work as a result of the post reduction exercise and staff redeployment as a consequence of a reduction in programme support costs.

3. As a result of the consultations mentioned above, as well as the secretariat's internal reform efforts reflected in the revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, the planned organizational structure of the Commission, to be implemented in the biennium 2000-2001, will comprise seven subprogrammes. To ensure congruence between the programme and secretariat structures, the secretariat is being reorganized in two phases. Phase I will be implemented in 1998 and phase II in 1999. The revised programme structure being submitted for the consideration and approval of the Commission is as follows:

Table 2. Proposed revised programme structure of the Commission

Legislative Committee	Subprogramme
Committee on Regional Economic Cooperation and its Steering Group	- Regional economic cooperation ^{2/}
Committee on Socio-economic Measures to Alleviate Poverty in Rural and Urban Areas	- Social development - Population and rural and urban development
Committee on Environment and Natural Resources Development	- Environment and natural resources development
Committee on Transport, Communications, Tourism and Infrastructure Development	- Transport, communications, tourism and infrastructure development
Committee on Statistics	- Statistics
Two Special Bodies: on Least Developed and Landlocked Developing Countries; and on Pacific Island Developing Countries	- Development research and policy analysis

^{2/} Two subprogrammes, "Regional economic cooperation: trade and investment" and "Regional economic cooperation: industry and technology", will be integrated into one subprogramme in mid-1999.

4. Other reform measures being implemented in connection with the revised structure include the following:

(a) The number of intergovernmental meetings, other than the Commission sessions, convened with the prior approval of the Commission will be reduced from 15 to five meetings per year. The maximum total number of days for such meetings will be reduced from 100 to 25 days per calendar year.

(b) The duration of the Commission session will be reduced from seven to six days, beginning in 1998.

(c) The responses of members and associate members to questionnaires on programme priorities and secretariat resource allocation will be reflected in the programme planning process for the current and subsequent bienniums.

(d) As a follow-up to the review in 1997 by the Open-ended Informal Working Group of ACPR, new policy guidelines will be established to streamline, review, oversee and monitor ESCAP publications, with a view to rendering the publications programme qualitatively superior, responsive to client demands, effective and cost efficient. The following steps have been undertaken:

- (i) The ESCAP Publications Committee was reconstituted in December 1997;
- (ii) Readership surveys are being carried out.

(e) A system for the self-evaluation of projects is being instituted. Since 1997, on-site evaluation of selective projects, with the involvement of the donor representatives, has also been undertaken. A similar evaluation of selected projects is planned for 1998.

(f) The recommendations of the efficiency review teams of the secretariat, which were established in 1996, are being implemented. The recommendations encompass the following issue areas: management and information systems and internal reporting; information, documentation and publications; conference services and related matters; general services, utilities and communications; staff training; and travel issues.

C. What is contemplated

5. The following measures are envisaged:

(a) The inter-agency consultative mechanism will be strengthened. The Regional Inter-agency Committee for Asia and the Pacific (RICAP) was established at the initiative of ESCAP in 1994. Its 13 subcommittees will become more deeply involved in substantive programme issues, including the United Nations system-wide follow-up to the global conferences. The aim will be to eliminate unnecessary duplication and ensure greater complementarity in programmes and activities. The RICAP mechanism will also be used for the formulation of joint projects and the pooling of resources for their implementation.

(b) The mechanism for consultation with subregional organizations (the Association of South East Asian Nations, the Pacific Community, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the Economic Cooperation Organization, and the Forum Secretariat), established at the initiative of ESCAP in 1994, will be strengthened. Substantive interaction and the follow-up of decisions will be improved, with a view to eliminating unnecessary duplication and ensuring greater complementarity in the programmes and activities undertaken.

(c) For the countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States, which enjoy membership of both the Economic Commission for Europe and ESCAP, coordination between ESCAP and ECE on programme implementation and advisory services will be improved. In this context, joint missions were undertaken by the two Executive Secretaries for the members of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan).

(d) Better coordination with United Nations Headquarters and other global units will be ensured through the mechanisms of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs (EC/ESA) and the Executive Committee of the United Nations Development Group (EC/UNDG), which were established by the Secretary-General.

- (e) At the intra-secretariat level, the following initiatives are also under way:
 - (i) A programme is being designed to allow electronic online retrieval of data on the implementation of projects undertaken by ESCAP.
 - (ii) An electronic bulletin board is being established to provide information on each country of the region. It will include information on ESCAP activities in each country and non-confidential information on advisory missions, training courses etc. Efforts will be made to include United Nations Development Programme country profiles and country strategy notes on the bulletin board.
 - (iii) A review body is being established on quality clearance for publications.
 - (iv) Possible reductions in programme support costs are being considered.