



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Thirty-ninth session
19-29 April 1983
Bangkok

ISSUES AND PROGRAMMES IN VARIOUS FIELDS OF
ACTIVITY OF ESCAP

(Item 8 of the provisional agenda)

MAIN ISSUES IN THE FIELD OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Note by the secretariat

1. The Commission's decision is required on two issues as follows:
 - (a) Ministerial-level conference on the environment in Asia,
 - (b) Convening of working group of experts on the environment.

In addition, the Commission may wish to endorse the terms of reference of the Environmental Co-ordinating Unit as suggested by the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and subsequently modified by the ESCAP Committee on Industry, Technology, Human Settlements and the Environment at its sixth session. Finally, it may wish to note the progress of implementation of resolution 224 (XXXVIII) entitled 'Incorporation of environmental considerations into the economic and social development activities of the Commission' and offer its views, if any, on the matter.

Ministerial-level conference on the environment in Asia

2. The Commission will recall that, at its thirty-eighth session, it "generally endorsed the proposal that a ministerial-level meeting on the environment be convened for the Asian subregional in order to review the problems of environmental management in the subregion and the progress made with regard to the implementation of the Asian Plan of Action for the Human Environment, which had been adopted in 1973". However, the Commission felt that "extensive preparatory activities were essential for the success of such a meeting", and it was suggested that the agenda, venue and date for the conference should be decided in close consultation with the governments of the region.

3. The Committee on Industry, Technology, Human Settlements and the Environment, at its sixth session, suggested that the first session of the Ad Hoc Working Group of Experts on the Environment in December 1982 should consider the agenda, venue and date for the proposed conference. It also suggested that recommendations of the working group should be placed before the Commission at its thirty-ninth session for a decision.

4. Regarding the agenda of the Conference, the working group made a tentative suggestion as follows

1. Opening of the meeting
2. Election of office bearers
3. Adoption of the agenda
4. Discussions on environmental management strategies and policies in the ESCAP region

- (a) Country policy statements
- (b) State of the environment in the Asian subregion.
an overview
5. Review of implementation of the resolutions of the Commission and Asian Plan of Action for the Human Environment.
 - (a) Asian Plan of Action for the Human Environment, 1973
 - (b) Resolution 125 (XXVIII), Regional co-operation in the field of human environment, 25 March 1972
 - (c) Resolution 131 (XXIX), Human environment, 21 April 1973
 - (d) Resolution 202 (XXXVI), Regional co-operation in environmental policy, management and law, 27 March 1980
 - (e) Resolution 224 (XXXVIII), Incorporation of environmental considerations into the economic and social development activities of the Commission, April 1982
6. Declaration on the Asian environment
7. Action plan for management of the Asian environment
8. Conclusions and recommendations
9. Other matters
10. Adoption of the report
11. Closing session

5. As to the venue, the working group recommended Bangkok, unless host facilities were offered by any member Government at the thirty-ninth session of the Commission and approved by it. In this regard, the Commission may wish to note that the Government of India has expressed preliminary interest in hosting the conference and the matter is under active consideration by the Government.

6. The Ad Hoc Working Group of Experts on the Environment suggested that the ministerial-level conference should be held in the early part of 1985 prior to the forty-first session of the Commission, and that its duration would be one week including a two-to-three-day preparatory meeting of senior officials. However, if the conference is to be hosted by India, November 1984 has been tentatively indicated as the most suitable timing for the conference.

7. On the basis of the above, the Commission may wish to endorse the agenda of the conference as suggested by the Ad Hoc Working Group of Experts on the Environment. The Commission may also wish to consider any offer of host

/facilities,

facilities, and decide on the venue and dates of the conference. Following the decisions of the Commission on the issue, the secretariat will begin preparation of documents and detailed consultations with the governments.

Convening of Ad Hoc Working Group of Experts on the Environment

8. The Commission, at its thirty-eighth session, "reiterated its support for convening an Ad Hoc Working Group Meeting of Experts on the Environment" in 1982. It was then felt that "the Ad Hoc Working Group of Experts, at its first meeting, should decide on the formation of a small working group with due consideration being given to the geographical representation of countries, as well as to continuity of membership at its subsequent meetings".

9. The first session of the Ad Hoc Working Group of Experts on the Environment was of the view that the formation of such a working group of experts would have a definite advantage to provide advisory and technical guidance to the secretariat. Considering all aspects, the meeting recommended that such a working group would (a) be an open-ended expert group having an advisory role, (b) meet once every alternate year, during which the legislative Committee on Industry, Technology, Human Settlements and the Environment would not concentrate on the subjects of human settlements and the environment, and (c) be convened subject to availability of funds. It was suggested that the next session of the working group be convened in 1984 before the ministerial-level conference, to review the report on the state of the environment in Asia and the draft declaration and action plan on the management of Asian environment.

10. The Commission may wish to consider and endorse the above recommendation regarding the convening of a working group of experts on the environment.

Terms of reference of the Environmental Co-ordinating Unit

11. At its thirty-eighth session, the Commission "felt that the Environmental Co-ordinating Unit should continue to play a central role in ensuring that environmental considerations were taken fully into account in the economic and social development activities of the Commission and restrict itself to priority areas as decided by the Commission". It emphasized "the need for the secretariat to maintain close collaboration with other relevant agencies, particularly UNEP", and felt that "by following those guide-lines, ESCAP would avoid duplication of activities concerned with the environment carried out in the region by UNEP and other agencies". The Governing Council of UNEP, at its tenth session in 1982, suggested a revision of the terms of reference of ECUs vis-à-vis the UNEP

Regional Office, in order to further delineate their respective functions. The revised terms of reference were subsequently examined by the Committee on Industry, Technology, Human Settlements and the Environment at its sixth session and some modifications were suggested which are presented in annex I to this document for Commission's endorsement.

Progress report on the implementation of
resolution 224 (XXXVIII)

12. The Commission, at its thirty-eighth session, adopted resolution 224 (XXXVIII) on the incorporation of environmental considerations into economic and social development activities. Paragraph 2 of the resolution "requests the Executive Secretary in the context of UNEP's support to the Environmental Co-ordinating Unit, to have consultations as a matter of urgency with the Executive Director of UNEP in order to ensure the continued incorporation of environmental consideration in the activities of the Commission at existing level". Paragraph 4 further "requests the Executive Secretary to ensure that three regular budget posts are available for the Environmental Co-ordinating Unit by exploring the possibility of redeploying existing resources within the United Nations or by other possible means and to report back to the Commission at its thirty-ninth session on the progress in the implementation of this resolution".

13. The Governing Council of UNEP, at its tenth session in 1982, adopted a decision (10/2 Section IV) on the "Structure and terms of reference of the regional offices and the environment co-ordination units in Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin American and the Caribbean" which requests the Executive Director to continue to provide institutional support to the regional commissions commensurate with their needs.

14. Subsequently, the thirty-seventh session of the General Assembly adopted resolution 37/217 on international cooperation in the field of the environment, which, in paragraph 9, "expresses the view that arrangements for the regional presence of the United Nations Environmental Programme should take fully into account the specific situations and needs of the various regions, in accordance with Governing Council decision 10/2 of 31 May 1982 on the regional presence of the programme'. The decision of UNEP Governing Council of UNEP referred to above is presented in annex II of this document.

15. Progress in implementation of ESCAP resolution 224 (XXXVII) and subsequent decision of the UNEP Governing Council and the General Assembly resolution has so far been quite satisfactory. On the basis of urgent consultation initiated

by the Executive Secretary of ESCAP and the decision of the Governing Council, UNEP has extended its institutional support to the secretariat for one year ending in December 1983. Parallel to this development, and also as a follow-up of resolution 22⁴ (XXXVIII), the Executive Secretary has requested the establishment of two additional regular budget posts in his programme budget proposals for 1984-1985. Furthermore, as an interim measure, the Executive Secretary has allocated one extrabudgetary post from the overhead funds, in order to enable the secretariat to cope with the implementation of its current programme of work in the field of environment.

16. In order to strengthen the co-operation between ESCAP and UNEP, the Executive Secretary of ESCAP invited the Executive Director of UNEP to pay an official visit to ESCAP headquarters in January 1983. During his visit, discussions were held on both policy and substantive matters in order to find ways and means to strengthen ESCAP's role of incorporating environmental considerations into the economic and social development activities of the region.

17. The Commission may wish to note these developments in the implementation of resolution 22⁴ (XXXVIII) and offer its comments, if any, on the matter.

/Annex I

Annex I

REVISED TERMS OF REFERENCE

ECU/ESCAP

(a) To review the programmes and projects of the regional commission at the planning stage, including projects for which the commission is acting as the executing agency, in order to ensure that environmental considerations are fully taken into account wherever appropriate;

(b) To contribute environmental inputs into the Commission's medium-term plan;

(c) To provide advice and assistance in planning and implementing the Commission's environmental activities and to monitor the progress of those activities;

(d) To maintain a continuing exchange of information with the regional office of UNEP, working closely together in all matters of common interest, especially for the purpose of serving the Governments of ESCAP's members and associate members in solving their environmental problems in the most effective manner;

(e) To keep the Executive Secretary of the Commission, and through him the Executive Director of UNEP, informed of the progress of the Commission's work in the field of the environment;

(f) To report to the Commission periodically as required, through the Executive Secretary, on developments of importance affecting the state of the environment in the region.

/Annex II

Annex II10/2. Regional Presence of the United Nations
Environment Programme a/

The Governing Council,

Having considered the report of the Executive Director,^{b/}

Recalling Governing Council decisions 6/10 of 24 May 1978, 7/12 of 3 May 1979, 8/16 B of 29 April 1980 and 9/21 of 26 May 1981,

Noting with satisfaction the technical co-operation among developing countries on environmental matters generated at the regional level through the implementation of regional environmental programmes,

Recognizing the desirability of further strengthening co-operative environmental efforts among Governments at the regional level,

Appreciating the continuing role and initiatives of the regional offices of the United Nations Environment Programme and the environment co-ordination units of the regional commissions, in co-operation with other agencies and organizations in the regions, in assisting Governments in formulating and implementing environmental programmes,

I. Regional needs

Expresses the view that arrangements for the regional presence of the United Nations Environment Programme should take fully into account the specific situations and needs of the various regions,

II. Regional presence in Africa and Asia and the Pacific

1. Requests the Executive Director to strengthen the regional presence of the Programme by restoring, within available resources, the financial support of the regional advisory services to levels commensurate with the need of the African and Asia and the Pacific regions,

2. Further requests the Executive Director to consider the possibility of utilizing the regional offices as a forum for periodic consultations among Governments,

3. Also requests the Executive Director, in co-operation with other organizations within and outside the United Nations system, to involve the scientific community and other relevant professional groups in furthering the co-operative efforts among Governments of these two regions;

/III.

a/ Adopted by the Governing Council of UNEP at its tenth session in May 1982 and subsequently endorsed by the thirty-seventh session of General Assembly in December 1982.

b/ UNEP/GC.10/2/Add.2 and Corr.1.

III. Regional presence in Latin America and the Caribbean

1. Invites Governments of Latin America and the Caribbean to consider convening periodic intergovernmental regional meetings on the environment in Latin America and the Caribbean for the purpose of formulating policies and a strategy for the region in this field,
2. Requests the Executive Director to provide secretariat support for such intergovernmental regional meetings through the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean,
3. Invites Governments of Latin America and the Caribbean to consider the possibility of holding meetings of government-nominated experts sufficiently in advance of sessions of the Governing Council to enable them to review the technical aspects of regional environmental programmes:
4. Authorizes the Executive Director to strengthen the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean by providing it, within available resources and without prejudice to support for the Environment Co-ordination Unit in the Regional Commission for Latin America, with the necessary financial resources and staff for the full performance of the functions required under this decision, so that it can serve as an effective instrument for the co-ordination of co-operative environmental efforts in the region,

IV. Structure and terms of reference of the regional offices and environment co-ordination units in Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean

1. Endorses the views of the Executive Director with respect to the integration of the regional advisory services and regional information support services into the regional offices of the United Nations Environment Programme for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean,
2. Further requests the Executive Director to continue to provide, at the present level, institutional support to the environment co-ordination units of the economic commissions for Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean commensurate with their needs,
3. Considers that the terms of reference proposed for the regional offices and environment co-ordination units in Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean, as they appear in annex I to the Executive Director's report, are appropriate and will help minimize overlap;

V. Regional presence in Europe

Requests the Executive Director, in view of the need for more effective and economically sound co-operative arrangements between the United Nations Environment Programme and the Economic Commission for Europe, to consult with Governments and the Commission on the desirability of establishing a joint Programme/Commission Division, bearing in mind the direct and specific regional responsibilities of the United Nations Environment Programme towards countries and the United Nations agencies and bodies in the region,

VI. Reporting

Finally requests the Executive Director to report to the Governing Council at its eleventh session of the progress in the implementation of the present decision.