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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

Regional Conference on Environment
and Sustainable Development
April 1991
Baghdad

PROGRAMME AND ORGANIZATION OF THE CONFERENCE

Note by the secretariat*

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION
FOR WESTERN ASIA**

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* Prepared on the basis of the relevant decisions on environment and development taken by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and in consultation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (and the host authorities, should the Conference be hosted outside the Commission's headquarters).

I. INTRODUCTION

1. By its resolution 165(XV) of 18 May 1989 on environment and development in the ESCWA region, and in particular paragraph 3 thereof, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) decided to undertake preparations at the regional level with a view to drawing up a report on the position of the Commission to be submitted to the United Nations conference on environment and development to be held in 1992. The General Assembly, in paragraph 16 of its resolution 42/187 of 11 December 1987 on the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, invited "Governments, in co-operation with the regional commissions and the United Nations Environment Programme, and, as appropriate, intergovernmental organizations, to support and engage in follow-up activities, such as conferences, at the national, regional and global levels". The General Assembly, in its resolution 44/228 of 22 December 1989 on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, section II, in paragraph 13 thereof, stressed "the importance of holding regional conferences on the environment and development with the full co-operation of the regional commissions", and recommended "that the results of such regional conferences be introduced into the preparatory process for the 1992 Conference, bearing in mind that regional conferences should make important substantive contributions to the Conference".

2. The present note outlines the detailed objectives of the Regional Conference and the specific topics for which discussion papers are solicited. A general description of the organization of working sessions at the Conference and a tentative schedule of further preparatory work are also included.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE

3. The major objective of the Conference is to consider how the recommendations of the World Commission on Environment and Development, which called for a reappraisal of current approaches to development and stressed the importance of the social and economic dimensions of environmental degradation, both at national and international levels, could be translated into action in the ESCWA region.

4. The growing awareness of environmental degradation has led to the linking of environmental issues with development, with the following objectives:

(a) To examine the state of the environment in the ESCWA region since the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment and since the adoption of such international agreements as the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification,^{1/} the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer (1985),^{2/} and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (1987);^{3/}

1/ Report of the United Nations Conference on Desertification, Nairobi, 29 August - 2 September 1977 (A/CONF.74/36), Chap. I.

2/ See United Nations Environment Programme, Register of International Treaties and Other Agreements in the Field of the Environment (UNEP/GC.15/INF.2).

3/ Ibid.

(b) To elaborate on national and regional ecological profiles, for concerted action to deal with major environmental issues in the socio-economic development process of ESCWA countries including measures to combat soil erosion, desertification, the protection of fresh water and coastal areas, industrial waste management, the control of air and water pollution, land use in urban areas and especially in metropolitan capitals of the region;

(c) To recommend measures to be taken at national and regional levels to protect and enhance the environment, through incorporating environmentally sound and sustainable development into the economic and social development process of member countries, and of various sectoral policies and through improving linkages between socio-economic parameters and environmental remedial measures;

(d) To examine strategies of national and regional action in response to the challenges of incorporating environmental considerations into sustainable national economic and social development programmes as substantive contributions to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Brazil, June 1992).

5. In the light of the relevant United Nations and ESCWA resolutions on environment and development and the current activities in this area within ESCWA member countries, the ESCWA secretariat, in consultations with UNEP and the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment (CAMRE), has decided to convene the Regional Conference on Environment and Sustainable Development. The Conference will serve as a forum for exchanging information and experience among ESCWA member countries on specific environmental priority topics including current developments and new global trends. The scope of the Conference will include both assessment and practical aspects of incorporating environmental dimensions into socio-economic plans. The Conference is further expected to aid the search for more effective linkages between institutions concerned with the environment and those concerned with development planning at various levels. Thus, the Conference could elaborate conclusions and recommendations for further action by ESCWA Governments as well as activities for the ESCWA secretariat in order to transform the recommendations of the above-mentioned World Commission report into national and regional policies and strategies.

III. TOPICS FOR THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE

6. Topic A. Assessment of contemporary environmental problem in the ESCWA region

- Trends and developments in the last decade;
- Presentation and discussion will be based on broad national reports related to this topic, as well as selected case-studies in this area, concentrating sectorally on trends and developments in the last decade.

7. Topic B. Regional response to the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development.

- Under this topic issues relating to the environment and sustainable development in a regional context will be discussed. These issues include food security; energy; population questions; the pressure of large cities; agriculture, land degradation and desertification; industry and industrial waste management; and the role of women in environment and development.

8. Topic C. Global environmental issues and concerns in achieving environmentally sound and sustainable development

- Protection of the atmosphere by combating climate change, depletion of the ozone layer; transboundary movement of toxic and hazardous wastes and the implications for the ESCWA region;
- Emerging environmental problems such as loss of biological diversity and threats posed by the disposal of hazardous wastes;
- Relationship between global environmental degradation and the structure of international economic relations.

9. Topic D. Strategies and declaration

- Specific strategies for national and regional plan of action to deal with major environmental issues in the ESCWA region;
- Arab Declarations on Environment.

IV. DOCUMENTATION FOR THE CONFERENCE

10. The documentation will consist of the following:

- Discussion papers transmitted by Governments and relevant international organizations in at least one of the two languages (Arabic and/or English) will be reproduced and circulated by the secretariat in the original language(s) to participants. These papers should not exceed 15 pages (including graphs and tables);
- Introductory reports on the main topics of the Conference will be prepared by the secretariat on the basis of discussion papers submitted. These introductory reports should not exceed five pages and will be translated into the other working language, reproduced and circulated by the secretariat;
- Conference room papers will be prepared and distributed during the conference;
- Background documents which participants may wish to bring to the Conference with a sufficient number of copies for distribution (100 Arabic and 50 English, or 150 if submitted in one language only). These documents would not be discussed at the Conference.

V. PARTIAL SCHEDULE OF FURTHER PREPARATORY WORK FOR THE CONFERENCE

- Invitation to Governments and relevant regional and international organizations to submit discussion papers, April 1990;
- Deadline for submission to the ESCWA secretariat of working papers by consultants, Governments and regional organizations, October 1990;
- Documents to be sent to Governments and participants, December 1990;
- Regional Conference, April 1991.

VI. PARTICIPATION

11. The duration of the Conference is proposed to be five working days, which might include a three-day meeting of senior officials, followed by a two-day conference of Arab Ministers concerned with environment and development. Unless a Government offers host facilities for the Conference, it will be convened at ESCWA headquarters in Baghdad.

12. Representatives of ESCWA member countries and of regional and international organizations which take part in its work may participate in the Conference. Under the provisions of rule 63 of the Commission's rules of procedure, representatives of United Nations member countries not members of the Commission may also participate in the Conference in a consultative capacity.

13. With a view to ensuring fruitful discussions, it is suggested that delegations should include representatives of different governmental bodies with a particular interest in the Conference and also experts from public and private enterprises concerned with matters relating to the topics to be considered at the Conference. Delegations should be headed by a senior official in a policy-making position. There is no fee for participation in the Conference.