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COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

SECTORAL MEETING BETWEEN THE ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE AND ITS SPECIALIZED INSTITUTIONS ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON ENVIRONMENT

INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 46/13 of 28 October 1991 on cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in cooperation with the Secretary-General of OIC, to convene sectoral meetings in certain areas of cooperation as a matter of priority, including environment and science and technology.

2. Following consultations between the United Nations system and OIC, it was agreed to hold a sectoral meeting on "Science and Technology with Special Emphasis on Environment" at Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 1992.

I. ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

3. The sectoral meeting was held at Dhaka from 19 to 22 December 1992. The main items on the agenda were the following:

(a) Review of the joint paper prepared by the Islamic Foundation for Science, Technology and Development (IFSTAD) and the United Nations Environment Programme/Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP/ROWA) on the theme of the meeting "Science and Technology with special emphasis on Environment";

(b) Consideration of papers prepared by the participating organizations, agencies and institutions of the United Nations system and of OIC as follows:

(i) "Experiences and capacities of the Department of Economic and Social Development in assisting developing countries to manage technological changes in the context of sustainable development" by the Department;

(ii) "Technology, Sustainable Development and Environment: OIC/United Nations Cooperation" by the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRTCIC);

(iii) "Promotion of Science and Technology for Sustainable Development in Islamic Countries" by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO);

(iv) "Promotion of Science and Technology and Protection of the Environment-Significance and Operational Relevance for the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB)" by IsDB;

(v) "Science, Technology and Environment" by the Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation (COMSTECH);

(vi) "Science and Technology Policies for Sustainable Development at the Micro Level" by the Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP);

(vii) "A Programme for Environmental Education, Training and Research for OIC Member States" by the Islamic Centre for Technical and Vocational Training and Research (ICTVTR);

(viii) "Health and Environment" by the World Health Organization (WHO);

(ix) "Refugees and the Environment" by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR);

(c) Bilateral discussions between organizations/agencies of the United Nations system and the specialized institutions of OIC.

4. Representatives of the following departments, organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations system participated in the meeting: Department of Political Affairs and Department of Economic and Social Development of the United Nations Secretariat, UNEP/ROWA, ESCAP, UNHCR, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and WHO.

5. Representatives of the following departments and specialized institutions of OIC participated in the meeting: General Secretariat of IFSTAD, SESRTCIC, ISESCO, IsDB, COMSTECH and ICTVTR.

6. UNEP/ROWA and IFSTAD were designated as lead agencies of the United Nations system and of OIC and its specialized institutions respectively. ICTVTR of OIC organized and serviced the meeting.

7. Mr. A. S. M. Mustafizur Rahman, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, inaugurated the meeting with an address. The inaugural session was also addressed by the Assistant Secretary-General of OIC,

the Director General of ICTVTR, and the Director-General of IFSTAD, as well as representatives of the United Nations and UNEP/ROWA.

II. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

A. The role of science and technology in development with specific emphasis on environment

8. Science and technology plays an essential role in slowing and reversing the trend of environmental degradation in the atmosphere, biosphere and geosphere and they should be central to the sustainable development objectives of the countries of the Muslim world. As many Islamic countries struggle to meet the current and future needs and aspirations of their growing populations, and face the challenge to protect the environment and conserve natural resources, the generation, transfer, application, management and dissemination of environmentally sound technologies will be of increasing importance.

9. The role of science and technology in development with its linkage to environment was focused on during the debate of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, which made considerable reference to science and technology and devoted two chapters exclusively on the subject in Agenda 21. The Conference made it evident that science and technology could be utilized to achieve economic growth and social development with minimum local and global adverse environmental consequences. To this end, the United Nations system is requested to cooperate closely with governmental and intergovernmental organizations to support their efforts to manage effectively technological change for sustainable development.

10. In order to assist the Islamic countries in achieving sustainable development, various forms of cooperation are required between the OIC system and the United Nations system in areas covering activities on scientific and technological research, technological development, education and training, technology monitoring, assessment and forecasting and technology transfer, as well as the application and management of environmentally sound technologies.

B. Science and technology issues in the Muslim world

11. The present process of technological change poses challenges to developing countries in general and to the Islamic countries in particular. The present status of science and technology and the weak technological base in the countries of the Muslim world, where many deficiencies and inadequacies exist, are exemplified by the following:

(a) Ineffective science and technology infrastructure;

(b) Ineffective science and technology management systems;

(c) Unsatisfactory national, subregional, regional and global coordination in the Muslim world;

(d) Scarcity of financial resources;

(e) Reliance on imported technologies and insufficient capabilities for developing and adapting technologies;

(f) Shortage of professional manpower for science and technology;

(g) General backwardness in human resource development;

(h) Lack of public interest and awareness;

(i) Lack of well defined priorities and needs.

12. The deficiencies and inadequacies mentioned above impact adversely on development processes and potentials of OIC member countries. The increasingly dominant role in technological progress by the developed countries has further aggravated the situation created by barriers related to trade, investment and capacity-building imposed on the Islamic countries. It is necessary to improve the science and technology base, particularly through promoting and facilitating the transfer, utilization and diffusion of advanced technologies in the Muslim countries. Within the context of management of science, technology and resources, dynamic approaches in the development sectors and international cooperation in science and technology would be required. It would also include a critical review on regimes of intellectual property rights with a view effectively to promoting scientific and technological developments.

C. Environmental issues in the Muslim world

13. A common characteristic of the environmental base of most OIC countries is its fragility. This fragility compounds the structural obstacles to development which OIC countries are encountering in the social and economic fields. Most African and West Asian member countries of OIC are located in arid and semi-arid zones where they are most vulnerable to drought and desertification; most of those located in Asia and the Pacific region are confronted with deforestation and soil erosion, while some are prone to natural disasters, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruption, floods and cyclones. These catastrophes, coupled with political instability in the regions, amplified environmental degradation in OIC member countries. By far the most important issues that should be addressed are, however, rapid population growth, poverty and the burden of financial debt to developed countries. These issues contribute to environmental degradation through the unsustainable practices of utilizing natural resources.

14. The OIC countries have already expressed their needs and commitments regarding international cooperation and national sustainable development through three common position papers, namely, the Arab Common Position Paper, the African Common Position Paper and the Asian and Pacific Common Position Paper. An analysis of the three position papers reveals that there are a number of environmental and development issues common to almost all OIC countries. These issues together with certain other issues, which are special to each of the three OIC regions, can formulate an agenda on environment and development for OIC countries. The impact of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development on OIC countries, in quality and magnitude, depends largely on how

and to what extent this agenda will be worked out at the forthcoming negotiations.

15. A macro-analysis of environmental issues in OIC countries and reflections on economic global issues have indicated the following four main strategic objectives for cooperation on environment and development among OIC countries:

(a) Arrest and reversal of environmental degradation;

(b) Management of population growth, redress of the depletion of natural resources and of development imbalance, and alleviation of poverty;

(c) Strengthening the capability for specialty in food production;

(d) Enhancement of environmentally sound and appropriate technology.

16. Cooperation among OIC countries, whether regional or subregional, cannot be effective unless it is strongly supported at the national level.

D. Areas of cooperation

17. Areas of cooperation should be based on the need for long-term, continuous, phase-by-phase development of national, regional and global projects of a cooperative and interdisciplinary nature. The existing programmes of both the United Nations and the relevant agencies and institutions of OIC and the associated national committees in OIC countries will be the main mechanisms for implementing and coordinating the future activities.

18. These activities may also involve cooperation with the relevant non-governmental organizations and will also take advantage of bilateral cooperation schemes relating to environmental protection and natural resources management. A wide range of cooperative activities, especially at the subregional and regional levels, will aim at pooling the resources and expertise of countries facing the same scientific, technological, environmental and developmental problems, in order to identify appropriate scientifically based solutions and adopt common approaches.

1. Science and technology for development

Strategic objectives

19. The scientific and technological basis for sustainable management should be strengthened through:

(a) Enhancing scientific and technological understanding;

(b) Improving long-term scientific and technological assessment;

(c) Building up endogenous scientific and technological capacity and capability.

Areas of cooperation

1. Impact of science and technology on society.

2. Science and technology policy.

3. Transfer of technology.

4. Capacity-building for technologies management.

5. Science and technology manpower development, management and training.

6. Data and information collection and use including statistics.

7. Technology monitoring, assessment and forecasting.

8. Science and technology information and popularization.

9. Science and technology cooperation, including in emerging, new and frontiers areas of science and technology.

10. Science and technology, trade and development.

2. Environment and development

Strategic objectives

20. Protection of the environment and natural resources management could be achieved by:

(a) Arresting and reversing environmental degradation;

(b) Management of population growth, depletion of natural resources, development imbalance and alleviating poverty;

(c) Strengthening the capability of food production;

(d) Enhancing environmentally sound and appropriate technology.

Areas of cooperation

1. Management of land resources and biodiversity, including prevention and reversal of deforestation and desertification.

2. Effective and appropriate management and utilization of fresh water resources.

3. Management of coastal and marine environmental resources.

4. Environmentally sound management and exploitation of mineral and energy resources.

5. Management of demographic change, population pressures and human settlements.

6. Integrated development.

7. Environmental awareness and education and popular participation, including the enhancement of the role and opportunities for women.

8. Development of environmental legislation.

9. Strengthening national capabilities for environmental management and sustained development.

10. Enhancing appropriate and environmentally sound technology.

III. BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS AMONG UNITED NATIONS AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE AGENCIES/ INSTITUTIONS

21. The presentation and discussion of papers was followed by bilateral discussions between organizations and agencies of the United Nations system and OIC institutions with a view to exploring the possibilities of cooperation.

Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

22. It was recommended that efforts should be to achieve closer cooperation between OIC and ESCAP in various areas related to environment. Particular emphasis should be placed on the specialized networks of the two systems and the exchange of data and information. Necessary steps should also be taken with regard to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between OIC and ESCAP relating to those areas of science and technology and environment which should be given attention as a matter of priority.

Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and World Health Organization (WHO)

23. It was agreed that ample scope existed for cooperation between WHO and OIC and its institutions, namely, IFSTAD, ICTVTR, SESRTCIC and ISESCO, particularly in the following areas:

(a) Promotion and strengthening of environmental health programmes in all member States;

(b) Provision of technical experts for the preparation and follow-up of the national action plans, prepared as a follow-up to the recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development;

(c) Regular exchange of publications and documentations;

(d) Strengthening of institutions dealing with environmental health training and research programmes, through the assistance of the WHO Centre for

Environmental Health Activities based at Amman and a similar centre located at Kuala Lumpur;

(e) Promotion of drinking water and air monitoring programmes for the purpose of maintaining the good health of the people;

(f) Promotion of the Healthy Cities concept to improve environmental health conditions through community action, with a view to preventing the impact of urbanization on health and promoting the exchange of information between cities;

(g) Strengthening food safety programmes;

(h) Promotion of the control of environmental pollution and chemical wastes.

Islamic Foundation for Science, Technology and Development (IFSTAD) and the Department of Economic and Social Development of the Secretariat

24. It was recommended that in the area of technology transfer, assistance would be given to developing countries in the formulation of policies and development of tools and mechanisms to promote and facilitate the transfer of technologies that are most appropriate to these countries' needs and priorities in environment and development.

25. In the field of capacity-building, support would be given to developing countries in their efforts to build the capacities needed to make effective use of the technology, whether transferred from abroad or self-generated.

26. In the field of technology assessment, the strengthening of technology monitoring, assessment and forecasting capabilities of developing countries were seen as essential elements of the capacity-building process in order to enable technology users in developing countries to make appropriate technology choices.

Islamic Foundation for Science, Technology and Development (IFSTAD) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

27. IFSTAD, as the OIC focal point for topics related to the environment, will guide UNHCR to possible cooperation partners among the specialized institutions in OIC countries. Such institutions are likely to be found in Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia and Malaysia. Besides information on these institutions, IFSTAD will also provide UNHCR with a copy of its printed roster of environmental experts and will grant access to its up-to-date database on such experts. Possible subjects for cooperation are rural technology subjects, especially energy technologies and low-cost housing to be applied in the implementation of the UNHCR policy on the environment in large-scale refugee situations.

Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) and the United Nations Environment Programme/Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP/ROWA)

28. UNEP/ROWA will cooperate with ISESCO in the identification of resource persons and the preparation of background technical materials for the following activities planned by ISESCO for 1993/94:

(a) Regional seminars on "Incorporation of Environmental Education into School Curricula";

(b) Workshop on "Environmental Legislation";

(c) Symposium on "Management of Water Resources";

(d) Symposium on "Conservation of Biological Diversity".

United Nations Environment Programme/Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP/ROWA) and the Office of the United High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

29. UNEP/ROWA intended to invite UNHCR to participate in the next training seminar sponsored by UNEP/ROWA and the Islamic Research and Training Institute (IRTI) of IsDB on "Environmental Impact Assessment", which was scheduled to be held in Turkey in mid-1993. This was to be followed by further investigation into how the expertise of UNEP/ROWA could be made available to facilitate implementation of the UNHCR environment policy.

Islamic Centre for Technical and Vocational Training and Research (ICTVTR) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

30. ICTVTR and UNEP agreed to look into the possibility of ICTVTR involvement in the activities of EETU programmes. ICTVTR will provide the training facilities while UNEP could provide national and resource persons who could conduct short courses and workshops in environmental education and training in OIC member countries.

Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRTCIC) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

31. SESRTCIC and UNEP agreed to consult further to explore the possibility of establishing, in close collaboration with UNEP, a specialized OIC environmental data bank in SESRTCIC.

Standing Committee on Scientific and Technical Cooperation (COMSTECH) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

32. UNEP will supply COMSTECH with technical information and publications on the application of cleaner production and cleaner technology. The representatives of the two organizations agreed to cooperate further in the exchange of information.

Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

33. Cooperation possibilities will be explored during an envisaged UNHCR mission to ISESCO headquarters at Rabat. Details were discussed at the recent meeting of the focal points of the lead agencies of the United Nations system and OIC, held from 27 to 29 October 1992.

Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) and United Nations Environment Programme/ Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP/ROWA)

34. UNEP/ROWA and IRTI of IsDB will continue to cooperate in organizing training courses and workshops on environmental topics. Whenever possible, UNEP will cooperate with IsDB in formulating programmes for the purpose of strengthening the institutional capacity of IsDB to deal with the environmental aspect of its operations. These may include training programmes for IsDB staff and help in focusing on environmental matters.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and World Health Organization (WHO)

35. WHO presented its involvement in collaboration with UNEP in environmental health work for refugees under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Possible closer cooperation between UNHCR and the "Centre for Environmental Health Activities" at Amman was suggested. The recent publications of the WHO Commission on Health and Environment may be studied concerning their relevance to the work of UNHCR.

Islamic Centre for Technical and Vocational Training and Research (ICTVTR) and the Department of Economic and Social Development

36. Human resource development, mainly through education and training, is the key element in achieving meaningful progress in environment and development. Basic and advanced education and training are paramount in the development of scientific knowledge and technical know-how, as well as in the understanding of the role of technology in the development process.

37. The building of the critical mass of capacity needed to make appropriate technology choices based on technology assessment and effectively to manage science and technology in the development process is a crucial task in the Islamic countries. Thus, the challenge will likely increase if sustainable development objectives are to be met. It is partly owing to the fact that the technologies represent highly sophisticated systems that are, by nature, increasingly knowledge-based and have a considerably high degree of interdisciplinary scientific content.

Islamic Centre for Technical and Vocational Training and Research (ICTVTR) and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

38. ICTVTR initiated a dialogue with the objective of taking a human development approach to long lasting refugee situations. UNHCR will provide information on past attempts within the concept of "Refugee Aid and Development" and on related subjects such as the socio-psychological situation of refugees. Further pursuit of this complex subject may require the intermediation of the OIC secretariat to broaden participation on the side of OIC.

39. In direct bilateral cooperation, ICTVTR and UNHCR will explore the possibility of increasing the participation of UNHCR-sponsored refugee scholars in ICTVTR training programmes.

Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation (COMSTECH) and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

40. At the request of COMSTECH, the FAO country offices will provide available statistical and technical information concerning agriculture, forestry, fishery and other relevant information needed.

Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

41. The benefit of IsDB coordination with UNHCR in its assistance to refugee hosting countries was highlighted. It was proposed to start such coordination with a visit by an IsDB delegation to UNHCR headquarters at Geneva and also to some refugee hosting areas. In particular, IsDB activities in members of the Commonwealth of Independent States could be coordinated with UNHCR refugee assistance and prevention activities in these countries.

42. Funding by IsDB of components in refugee assistance programmes which prevent negative environmental impacts by refugees and rehabilitate degraded lands could be promoted. Similarly, the use of undisbursed environmental protection funds could be examined.

Islamic Centre for Technical and Vocational Training and Research (ICTVTR) and Islamic Development Bank (IsDB)

43. Discussions were held between ICTVTR and IsDB, during which a number of possibilities were explored. It was suggested that:

(a) Under the scholarship IsDB programme, the possibility of joining students wishing to pursue a Bachelor of Sciences engineering degree programme and other degree programmes of ICTVTR for Muslim students from non-member countries and Palestine would be explored;

(b) ICTVTR also requested support for capacity-building. This might be pursued through a formal request for support from the IsDB technical cooperation programme.

Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) and Islamic Centre for Technical and Vocational Training and Research (ICTVTR)

44. The two organizations agreed to look into the possibility of further cooperation in the areas of basic education and training, science and technology, skills development, technical and vocational education and training, environmental education and research.

Islamic Foundation for Science, Technology and Development (IFSTAD) and Islamic Centre for Technical and Vocational Training and Research (ICTVTR)

45. The two organizations agreed to sign a memorandum of understanding providing general cooperation in the areas of science and technology, environment and human resources development. IFSTAD agreed to collaborate more fully and to offer scholarships according to procedures and availability of

funds to students and trainees, particularly in the ICTVTR-sponsored Bachelor of Science programme in engineering.

Islamic Centre for Technical and Vocational Training and Research (ICTVTR) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

46. In order to facilitate human resources development in the fields of environment and energy, ESCAP will cooperate with ICTVTR and will explore the possibility of providing resource persons for short/special course seminars to be offered by ICTVTR on environment and energy from time to time.

Islamic Centre for Technical and Vocational Training and Research (ICTVTR) and the Standing Committee on Scientific and Technical Cooperation (COMSTECH)

47. The meeting noted that there was an agreement between ICTVTR and COMSTECH for cooperation in different areas, such the holding of seminars/workshops. COMSTECH agreed to look into the possibility of sponsoring students for a Bachelor of Science degree in engineering, and other graduate programmes at ICTVTR.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

48. Based on the deliberations of the meeting and on a paper prepared jointly by IFSTAD and UNEP/ROWA and on other working papers discussed by the meeting, it was concluded that expert advice and consultancy services would be required to prepare a detailed medium-term plan of action.

49. The meeting also decided that the focal points of the two organizations would monitor cooperation between OIC and the United Nations system with the following objectives:

(a) Overcoming problems and constraints;

(b) Identifying gaps for further activities;

(c) Strengthening the information network.

50. The objectives would be achieved through the following:

(a) Identification of efficient ways of permanent interaction, including the exchange of information and relevant dimension;

(b) Submission of information and data by the United Nations system to COMSTECH on specific areas of environment and development, as requested to update COMSTECH thematic profiles;

(c) Involvement of non-governmental organizations, particularly in enhancing environmental awareness among grass-roots communities;

(d) Possible involvement of units of OIC and the United Nations system in financing, including supporting of scholarships and scientific curricula as requested by ICTVTR;

(e) Utilization by IsDB of expertise available through OIC subsidiary organs in furthering its activities in the area of science, technology and environment and in order to reflect on the existing OIC science and technology Plan of Action and the report on the "State of the environment in OIC member countries", which already elaborate the major problems faced by these countries in this field;

(f) Encouragement of the holding of bilateral meetings between the individual United Nations organizations/agencies and specific OIC institutions for the purpose of consolidation of coordinated and cooperative activities.

Follow-up action

51. The meeting decided that two focal points, IFSTAD and UNEP would work out a programme of action based on the conclusions and recommendations of the United Nations/OIC sectoral meeting. The programme of action would be submitted to a technical session, to be convened not later than September 1993, which would prepare a medium-term plan of action. The meeting also agreed that IFSTAD and UNEP would collaborate with the Department of Economic and Social Development of the Secretariat in the follow-up of the Programme of Action.

52. UNDP has been requested to examine the possibility of providing the necessary consultancy support in consultation with UNEP and IFSTAD, the two designated focal points, to prepare the draft medium-term plan of cooperation.

53. It was agreed that the question of holding the next sectoral meeting would be discussed at the United Nations/OIC general meeting to be held in 1993.

54. The meeting expressed its deep appreciation and sincere thanks to the Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh for the assistance provided to ICTVTR in the organization of the meeting. It also thanked Mr. A. M. Patwari, Director-General of ICTVTR, and his able staff members for their warm hospitality and their excellent arrangements and facilities for the meeting.
