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COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
Third session
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Agenda item 13

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ITS THIRD SESSION

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Mohammad Nawaz KHAN

Chapter _____

SUMMARY

A. General

1. In accordance with its mandate, the Committee identified and pursued priority questions concerning long-term problems and trends of world-wide significance in the field of mineral and water resources, notably in relation to sustainable development and poverty alleviation, and developed advice for the Economic and Social Council with respect to concrete actions for the implementation of Agenda 21 and for the programming and implementation of activities in the United Nations system.

2. The Committee expressed its appreciation of the inter-agency cooperation that had already occurred, notably in relation to a comprehensive assessment of the freshwater resources of the world, the global water partnerships, the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa and the Global Environmental Monitoring System: Water. The Committee identified particular priority directions within the scope of those initiatives, and also identified similar needs for inter-agency cooperation in relation to key minerals issues.

B. Water [to be completed]

C. Minerals

3. The Committee gave particular attention to minerals issues in the context of the priority accorded, at relevant international conferences, to the need to move towards sustainable production and consumption patterns. The Committee noted that the definition of those patterns had to take into account key minerals issues - the capacity of the environment to absorb the effects of the use of mineral resources, the sustainability of supply of essentially non-renewable mineral resources, and the possibility of modifying production and consumption patterns through greater efficiency of minerals use, new technologies, recycling and substitution. Moreover those minerals issues required the consideration of the whole mineral cycle from mineral exploration and discovery, through extraction, processing, manufacture and utilization to eventual recovery or disposal.

4. The Committee concluded that global demand was likely to increase for the foreseeable future, mainly as a result of the continuing increase in global population through most of the next century, and of the demand for improved living standards in developing countries. The Committee also concluded that present demand trends, and the consumption patterns that caused them were unsustainable, so that strategies to maintain supply had to be linked to effective strategies to move to sustainable consumption and production patterns.

5. Concerns about environmental impacts and competition for land use as the global population expanded, were also reducing the capacity to meet the demand for minerals. It was therefore important that issues of minerals supply should be part of the integrated approach to land management promoted in Agenda 21.

6. The time-scales for the stabilization of the global economy and adjustment to a relatively steady state and equitable society, in which population was in broad balance with the availability of resources, were not within the reasonably foreseeable future. Emphasis therefore needed to be placed on avoiding potential problems by improving strategies for the optimal and efficient supply and use of mineral resources with minimal environmental impact.

7. In accordance with the "precautionary principle", the Committee, in the draft resolution recommended for adoption by the Economic and Social Council, identified a number of concrete steps at the global level which could assist in the management of mineral resources and of environmental impacts during the period of transition to more sustainable consumption patterns.

8. The Committee was of the opinion that implementation of those steps required leadership from and coordination by the United Nations system. The Committee also reviewed a number of social and economic issues in the minerals sector that had a bearing on, in particular, developing countries and economies in transition. It decided that the basic problem of improving the capacity of those countries to capture the economic and social benefit of their potential for mineral production should be the principal focus of its inter-sessional activities and of the agenda of its fourth session.

MATTERS CALLING FOR ACTION BY THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
OR BROUGHT TO ITS ATTENTION

A. Draft resolution

9. The Committee on Natural Resources recommends to the Economic and Social Council the adoption of the following draft resolution:

Integration of key minerals issues into the
implementation of Agenda 21

The Economic and Social Council,

Recalling that Agenda 21 called for the identification of balanced patterns of consumption world wide which the Earth can support in the long term,

Recalling also that in Agenda 21 and the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development it is stated that the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries, which is a matter of grave concern, aggravating poverty and imbalances,

Noting that the policy implications of trends and projections in consumption and production patterns were evaluated in a report of the Secretary-General submitted to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fourth session in 1996, 1/ and that the Commission endorsed the eco-efficiency approach and stressed the need for an appropriate balance between supply side and demand side approaches,

Noting also that in its inter-sessional strategy paper entitled "Towards the sustainable supply of minerals in the context of Agenda 21", 2/ the Committee on Natural Resources analysed the implications of those policy approaches for the minerals sector in terms of the capacity of the environment to absorb the effects of minerals resource use, the sustainability of supply of essentially non-renewable mineral resources, and the possibility of modifying production and consumption patterns throughout the mineral cycle, through greater efficiency of minerals use, new technologies, recycling and substitution,

Recalling that those minerals issues impinge heavily on developing countries and countries in transition which seek to capture greater benefits from mineral development and consequently recalling also the need to avoid undesirable impacts on those economies,

1/ E/CN.17/1996/5 and Add.1.

2/ E/C.7/1996/11.

1. Brings to the attention of the Committee on Sustainable Development and to United Nations organizations and regional commissions the inter-sessional strategy paper entitled "Towards the sustainable supply of minerals in the context of Agenda 21";

2. Commends and endorses, in principle, the recommendations for concrete action contained in resolutions 3/4, 3/5 and 3/6 of the Committee on Natural Resources, and urges full consideration of means of implementation through the relevant priority programmes, and by maximizing the opportunities for collaboration between interested parties.

B. Resolutions of the Committee brought to the attention of the Council

10. The following resolutions of the Committee are brought to the attention of the Economic and Social Council:

Resolution 3/1. Activities of the United Nations system in the field of water and mineral resources, and inter-agency cooperation

The Committee on Natural Resources,

Noting with appreciation the valuable overviews provided to the Committee in both the minerals and the water sectors and also the reports submitted by United Nations organizations and regional commissions,

Recognizing the value of such reporting as a background to its deliberations and in the provision of advice to the Economic and Social Council,

Recognizing also that the Committee provides a unique forum for interaction between executing agencies of the United Nations system and a wide range of world opinion and that direct input from United Nations organizations to the Committee's discussion of issues and priorities is highly desirable,

Noting the valuable opportunity for exchange of information and views provided during the current session by the Symposium on Corporations, Communities and Sustainable Development, organized by the Division of Environment Management and Social Development of the Department for Development Support and Management Services of the Secretariat,

1. Requests the Secretary-General to provide similar overview reports for the Committee at its fourth session;

2. Requests the United Nations Secretariat to provide Committee members with timely information and documentation on relevant deliberations, decisions and actions of the United Nations system, including those of the regional commissions, during the inter-sessional period;

3. Invites United Nations organizations and regional commissions and non-governmental organizations to join with the Committee in active discussion of the agenda items at the Committee's fourth session and, most particularly, of the Committee's own strategy papers.

Resolution 3/2. Environmental protection and restoration issues arising from mineral industry activities

The Committee on Natural Resources,

Noting with appreciation the report of the Secretary-General on key advances in the development and application of state-of-the-art technologies for minimizing degradation caused by the mining and processing of mineral resources, 3/

Noting also the substantial advances made in best practices in this area in recent years, especially by major mining companies, as shown in various publications containing case-studies of environmental practices, including those of the United Nations Environment Programme and the International Council on Metals and the Environment,

Noting further that environmentally sound projects are also generally economically sound, and provide a better basis for social development than short-term developments that require costly remediation,

Recognizing, however, that knowledge of, and capacity to employ, the most efficient and environmentally friendly technologies may often be lacking in developing countries,

Recognizing also that economic imperatives may jeopardize the adoption of appropriate practices,

1. Encourages the development of the role of the United Nations system as a focal point for the collection and dissemination of information on a continuing basis;

2. Also encourages the cooperation of international research and funding agencies and investors, with host countries, in the preparation and implementation of environmental impact assessments and management plans.

Resolution 3/3. Issues relating to the social and economic impacts of the mining sector, especially in developing countries and in economies in transition

The Committee on Natural Resources,

Recalling that in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development it is pointed out that while the global wealth of nations has multiplied sevenfold in the past fifty years, the situation of most developing countries, and particularly of Africa and the least developed countries, is critical and requires special attention and action, and that countries with economies in transition also require the support of the international community,

Noting that the mining sector is of considerable potential importance for narrowing the gap between developed and developing countries,

Recognizing, in particular, the important role that the development of significant mineral deposits has often played in the social and economic development of local communities,

Recognizing also that artisanal and small-scale mining can also initiate and contribute to economic and social development under appropriate conditions,

Having considered with appreciation the report of the Secretary-General containing an assessment of benefits accruing to host countries from the inflow of funds and technology for mineral development 4/ and the report of the Secretary-General on developments in small-scale mining, 5/

1. Notes, with respect to capital-intensive mining projects with finite operational lives, that sustainability of development after termination of mining presents special problems, and therefore urges Governments to put mechanisms in place, as part of their regulatory regimes, to ensure participation in decision-making by all parties involved at each stage of mineral project development, with the particular aim of capturing the benefits for the long term;

2. Urges Member States, with respect to small-scale mining, to put in place appropriate, people-centred, institutional and regulatory arrangements which would formalize these economic activities, and allow appropriate interaction with, and assistance from, international financing institutions and multinational mining companies;

3. Notes the negative social impacts on local communities, sometimes associated with the privatization of State-owned mineral assets, particularly where State mining enterprises are also involved in the maintenance of civic facilities, and concludes that, as far as possible, innovative privatization

4/ E/C.7/1996/8.

5/ E/C.7/1996/9.

plans should be devised so that provision is made for all the economic and social functions previously performed;

4. Decides that the basic problem of improving the capacity of developing countries and economies in transition to capture the economic and social benefits of their potential for mineral production should be the principal focus of its inter-sessional activities and of the agenda of its fourth session, and requests the Secretary-General to prepare a discussion paper on this topic, with the assistance of members of the Committee.

Resolution 3/4. Top-level scientific and technical body
on mining and materials

The Committee on Natural Resources,

Noting the compelling evidence that current trends of increasing use of both metallic and non-metallic minerals are unsustainable, both in terms of supply and of environmental impacts,

Noting also the need for proposed changes in production and consumption patterns to be based on objective and authoritative scientific and technical assessments of impacts throughout the life cycle of mineral use,

Conscious of the absence of any widely representative top-level scientific and technical body that currently fills this function,

Aware, however, of the current more limited, but developing, independent initiatives in this field by various organizations, including the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development,

1. Endorses the need for a top-level body on mining and materials to be established to assess and report on technological progress towards the sustainable extraction and use of mineral resources through improved efficiency, new technologies, substitution and recycling;

2. Recommends that the above-mentioned organizations, in the light of the Committee's strategy paper, 2/ consult together and with appropriate governmental and non-governmental organizations (such as the International Council on Metals and the Environment) with a view to forging a partnership to fulfil the proposed scientific and technical functions in a comprehensive and authoritative way.

Resolution 3/5. Global land monitoring programme

The Committee on Natural Resources,

Noting that there is currently a huge gap in global environmental monitoring programmes, in that current programmes do not deal with the natural

chemical variability of the land surface, or with changes brought about by both natural and orthopogenic processes,

Noting also that a comprehensive blueprint for such a programme has already been produced by the International Geochemical Mapping Project sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the International Union of Geological Sciences, and that there is an urgent need for its implementation,

Recognizing also that since land-based activities are the source of most pollution of both the freshwater and marine environments, such a land-monitoring programme would be complementary to and greatly enhance the value of existing programmes, in particular the multi-agency programme, Global Environmental Monitoring System: Water, designed to monitor freshwater for development under the leadership of the World Health Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme,

Recognizing further that a complementary programme, Global Environmental Monitoring System: Land, would be highly relevant to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, with its role as lead agency in the coordination of integrated land management under Agenda 21,

1. Endorses the need for a global geochemical database in order to provide an essential contribution to objective and effective environmental and resource management;

2. Recommends that the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme consult together, in the light of the Committee's strategy paper, 2/ the blueprint produced by the International Geochemical Mapping Project and the experience with the Global Environmental Monitoring System: Water, with a view to formulating a plan for cooperation with national agencies in order to develop a global geochemical database.

Resolution 3/6. Global knowledge base on mineral resource potential

The Committee on Natural Resources,

Noting that it is essential that strategies to move to sustainable consumption and production patterns of minerals be linked to strategies to maintain supply, and that the goal of ensuring optimal and efficient use of available resources with minimum environmental impact requires that the demand be met from the most efficient sources world wide,

Noting also that population pressures world wide, and the attendant environmental impacts, are causing increasingly severe competition for land use, so that it is important for issues of mineral supply to be considered part of the integrated approach to the planning and management of land resources, as proposed in Agenda 21,

Considering that product management, following the precautionary principle, requires that appropriate information be available on the sustainability of supply during the period of transition to sustainable consumption and production patterns,

Aware that those issues are particularly important for developing countries and economies in transition,

1. Endorses the need for a global knowledge base on mineral resource potential, in terms of potential source areas, to be developed so that it can be integrated with other land-use information as an essential part of an integrated approach to the planning and management of natural resources;

2. Recommends that the United Nations Secretariat, in consultation with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the regional commissions and the international mining industry, consider the detailed requirements of such a knowledge base, in the light of the Committee's strategy paper 2/ and ways in which it might be achieved, including initiation through a regional pilot project.
