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Item 6 (a) of the provisional agenda

**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION****PROGRESS MADE DURING 1996 IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR THE BIENNIUM 1996-1997**

Report on
the first session of the Committee on Water Resources

A. Venue, date and objectives of the session

1. The first session of the Committee on Water Resources was held on 30 March 1997 at the temporary headquarters of ESCWA in Amman.
2. The main objectives of the session were as follows:
 - (a) To review the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 and in particular the natural (water) resources activities within the subprogramme on the management of natural resources and environment;
 - (b) To participate in the determination and formulation of the priorities of the programme of work and the medium-term plan in the field of water resources through the following:
 - (i) Reviewing of the programme of work and priorities for the biennium 1996-1997 currently being implemented;
 - (ii) Discussing the draft programme of work and priorities for the biennium 1998-1999;
 - (iii) Formulating proposals and priorities for the future programme of work and priorities for the biennium 2000-2001 in the field of water resources;

- (iv) Following up the implementation of the resolutions of the international and regional conferences on water resources and the participation of ESCWA member countries in these conferences.

B. Opening of the session

3. The session opened on Sunday, 30 March 1997, with a statement by His Excellency Mr. Munther Haddadin, Minister of Water and Irrigation, in which he pointed out the benefits of regional cooperation in the field of water resources as well as the challenges faced in this respect including the protection of water resources from pollution, abuse, depletion and deterioration in quality. He also stressed the need to achieve the maximum degree of efficiency in the storage, transport, distribution and use of water, pointing out the priorities in this regard and the need to increase efficiency in the management of water resources and to rationalize their use. Finally, he expressed the hope that a framework of regional cooperation would be adopted in the region for the benefit of all countries.

4. The Executive Secretary of ESCWA made a statement in which he stressed the importance of water resources in the region and referred to the current imbalance between water resources and population in many ESCWA member countries. He also affirmed the importance of the Committee on Water Resources established by ESCWA resolution 205 (XVIII) of 25 May 1995, stating that some regional commissions of the United Nations had already formed such committees, and that the establishment of the Committee on Water Resources in the ESCWA region had taken place during a critical phase in the history of the region. He referred to the regional and subregional projects that ESCWA had implemented or intended to implement with the support of some Governments, including the Government of Germany, as well as some international banking institutions. Finally, he expressed the hope that the session would produce specific results and recommendations in line with the aspirations of the countries of the region which would facilitate the task of decision makers and the competent water authorities.

5. Attending the session were experts from Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, as well as experts from international and regional organizations. The representative of Jordan was elected Chairman of the session while the representatives of Lebanon and Oman were elected Vice-President and Rapporteur respectively.

C. Summary of the working papers submitted by ESCWA to the first session of the Committee on Water Resources

6. After the resolution on the establishment of the Committee on Water Resources had been read out to the members of the Committee, the ESCWA secretariat presented its working papers, the main points of which are highlighted below.

1. "Medium-term plan, subprogramme for management of natural resources and environment for the period 1998-2001"
(E/ESCWA/ENR/1997/IG.1/4)

7. ESCWA presented the text related to natural resources in the ESCWA medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, with specific reference to the subprogramme on the management of natural resources and environment, stressing the main objectives and priorities of the subprogramme which constituted the general

framework of the draft and future programmes of work and priorities for the two bienniums 1998-1999 and 2000-2001 and which included the following:

(a) Promoting integrated approaches to the management of water resources in order to meet the challenges stemming from the shortage of freshwater resources, the deterioration of their quality, and the rapid increase in the demand for water for multiple purposes, viewed in the context of population growth and the rapid developments in agriculture and industry in most of the countries of the region;

(b) Contributing effectively to the design of schemes for the rational utilization and conservation of freshwater resources by increasing public awareness and community participation in these areas and in the implementation of water projects and environmental protection programmes;

(c) Assisting the countries of the region in the formulation of programmes for improving the infrastructure of the water sector, as well as in the diffusion of information on new technologies for the development of conventional and non-conventional water resources;

(d) Supporting Governments in their efforts to establish intraregional and interregional mechanisms for the development and management of shared water resources.

2. "Progress achieved by the Energy, Natural Resources and Environment Division in the implementation of the subprogramme on the management of natural resources and environment in 1996 and 1997"
(E/ESCWA/ENR/1997/IG.1/3)

8. The ESCWA secretariat reviewed the following activities that were carried out in 1996 or are being implemented in 1997:

(a) The Expert Group Meeting on Water Legislation in the ESCWA Region, which was held in 1996. The study related to this Meeting is currently under publication;

(b) The expert group meeting on the development of non-conventional water resources scheduled to be held in Bahrain during the last quarter of 1997 (and a related technical publication), which deals with the following themes:

- (i) The desalination of brackish and sea water;
- (ii) The re-use of wastewaters;
- (iii) Water harvesting and artificial groundwater recharge;
- (iv) The management and development of non-conventional water resources;

(c) A study on the coordination of national efforts for optimal utilization of shared water resources in the region;

(d) A review of the impact of pricing policies on water demand;

(e) A study on water pollution in selected urban areas in the ESCWA region: case-studies on Damascus, Jeddah and Gaza;

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- (f) A study on the carbonate aquifer shared by a number of ESCWA member countries.

9. The members of the Commission were also informed about the publication of a number of studies and technical reports, including the "Investigation of [the] basalt aquifer system shared by Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic", the Water Resources Assessment in the ESCWA Region Using Remote Sensing and GIS Techniques: Final Report, and the Proceedings of the Expert Group Meeting on the Implications of Agenda 21 for Integrated Water Management in the ESCWA Region (the Meeting was held in Amman in October 1995).

10. The ESCWA secretariat then presented a review of the training activities carried out by the Energy, Natural Resources and Environment Division, including the Training Course on Using Remote Sensing Data and GIS Techniques in Hydrology and Hydrogeology, held at the Royal Jordanian Geographic Centre, and the Training Course on Farm Water Management and Rationalization for a small group of experts from different ESCWA member countries held at the Training Centre attached to the Ministry of Public Works and Water Resources in Kafr el-Sheikh, Egypt, for a period of two months in 1996 within the framework of the Regional Training Network in the Water Sector in the ESCWA Region.

11. The ESCWA secretariat also informed the members of the Committee about the technical assistance provided to member States through regional advisers in various areas related to water resources.

3. "Subprogramme on the management of natural resources and environment:
programme of work for the biennium 1998-1999"
(E/ESCWA/ENR/1997/IG.1/5)

12. The ESCWA secretariat presented to the Committee the draft programme of work for the biennium 1998-1999 which is to be submitted to the nineteenth ministerial session of ESCWA in May 1997. The ESCWA secretariat also reviewed the activities of the draft programme, including the following:

(a) An expert group meeting and a study on updating the assessment of water resources in ESCWA member countries. The ESCWA secretariat is expected to present to this meeting a draft proposal for updating water resources assessment methods which includes a comparison between conventional and non-conventional techniques used in water resources assessment, with a view to helping the participants reach a consensus on water resources assessment;

(b) The proceedings of an expert group meeting on the harmonization of environmental standards in the water sectors of ESCWA member States, along with a related study;

(c) A study on the development of freshwater resources in rural areas in the ESCWA region through the use of non-conventional techniques;

(d) A study on current water policies and practices in selected ESCWA member countries.

4. Investigation of [the] basalt aquifer system shared by Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic
(E/ESCWA/ENR/1997/WG.1/WP.4)

13. The ESCWA secretariat presented the study entitled "Investigation of [the] basalt aquifer system shared by Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic" which was prepared at the end of 1996 and published in 1997. The study covered a related project carried out during 1994 and 1995. The presentation focused on the following:

(a) The objectives of this project were to establish an information base on the hydrogeological conditions prevailing in the region, to determine the relation between the basalt aquifer system and the neighbouring water basins at discharge points, and to study the quality of groundwater in the region and the impact of water use on the future of the aquifer system;

(b) ESCWA was the main executing agency of the project, whose activities were carried out through cooperation and coordination at the technical level between experts from the Energy, Natural Resources and Environment Division at ESCWA and the competent authorities in the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan. ESCWA was assisted by experts and consultants from the region as the project required, and by the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources (BGR) on the basis of an agreement concluded between the Institute and the ESCWA secretariat. The competent technical authorities in both Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic provided the information required and cooperated with the representatives of ESCWA in implementing the project, in discussing and reviewing the technical reports and maps that had been prepared as well as the studies associated with the project before their publication in their final form;

(c) The implementation of this project demonstrated the role ESCWA could play in establishing a dialogue between the countries of the region in the field of water resources;

(d) Modern techniques such as isotope hydrology and remote sensing were used in studying the principal water sources and aquifer recharge;

(e) Teams of technicians in both Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic provided information on surface water monitoring stations, rain-gauge data and vaporization, and provided the experts with the available technical reports on prevailing geological characteristics and phenomena, pumping experiments, depth to groundwater levels, spring discharge and well yield. It was necessary to standardize the methods of compiling and tabulating hydrogeological information and of analysing the results of remote sensing and isotope hydrology;

(f) The main results of the project can be summarized as follows:

(i) A unified geological map was constructed for the area comprising the basalt aquifer system covering the southern part of the Syrian Arab Republic and the north-eastern part of Jordan using remote sensing and ground truth data that were collected;

(ii) Fifteen thematic maps were prepared showing the hydraulic characteristics of this aquifer, including depth to groundwater level, groundwater movement, and groundwater thickness and quality;

- (iii) The study revealed a number of problems requiring attention, including the increased groundwater salinization resulting from excessive pumping; the hazards associated with the flow of brackish water to the Azraq basin, which provides Amman with part of the fresh water it consumes; and the widespread occurrence of brackish groundwater in the north-eastern and eastern parts of the shared aquifer system;
- (iv) Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic must take joint responsibility for managing and developing the aquifer they share; within this context, a comprehensive approach must be taken in order to foster common interests.

5. "Assessment of water resources using remote sensing techniques, in the ESCWA region"
(E/ESCWA/ENR/1997/WG.1/WP.3)

14. The document entitled "Assessment of water resources using remote sensing techniques in the ESCWA region" submitted by ESCWA to the Committee on Water Resources contains a summary of the final report published at the end of 1996 on the special project on water resources assessment in the ESCWA region using remote sensing and GIS techniques (E/ESCWA/ENR/1996/7). The Royal Jordanian Geographic Centre implemented the project and prepared the report under the supervision and with partial financing from ESCWA and with generous financial support from the United Nations Environment Programme and the Islamic Development Bank. The objective of the project was to strengthen regional cooperation between the ESCWA member countries through the implementation of a regional project on the use of modern techniques that would be likely to contribute to increasing knowledge about available or exploitable water resources. The study, which covers all the countries of the ESCWA region and concentrates on the development of geological, hydrological and hydrogeological maps at various scales, has contributed to the formulation of appropriate strategies for the use of surface and groundwater resources; it also stresses the need for strengthening regional and subregional cooperation in the field of shared water resources.

6. "Regional study of Paleogene carbonate aquifers in ESCWA countries"
(E/ESCWA/ENR/1997/WG.1/WP.5)

15. Experts from ESCWA and the BGR presented the "Regional study of Paleogene carbonate aquifers in ESCWA countries", which contains a work plan for the implementation of a related project. The project is presently being carried out, and the draft of the preliminary report is expected to be completed by the end of 1997. The objective of this project is to strengthen regional and subregional cooperation in the exploitation of shared groundwater resources in the ESCWA region, as the aquifer system in question is shared by several ESCWA member countries, namely Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and most of the Gulf countries. The presentation included the following:

(a) Discussion of a work plan for the first phase of the project, which includes the preparation of thematic maps, the evaluation of information on the geological and hydrogeological features of the region covered by the study, and the evaluation of available hydrochemical and isotope hydrologic data on the Paleogene carbonate aquifers;

(b) Discussion of the draft report, which will include maps prepared at different scales which show the Paleogene carbonate aquifers, their extent, topography, and main groundwater discharge areas, and mean annual rainfall so that a hydrological picture of the area can be constructed.

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16. With respect to the above, numerous regional and international organizations have expressed their wish to cooperate with ESCWA in the implementation of a number of activities listed in the draft programme of work and priorities for the biennium 1998-1999, including those related to the updating of the assessment of water resources and the re-use of wastewater. ESCWA will contact these organizations before starting the implementation of these activities in order to determine possible mechanisms for cooperation.

D. Discussion

17. The discussion opened with a statement by the Executive Secretary in which he stressed the need for interaction between ESCWA and its member States through the technical committees that ESCWA was in the process of establishing, including the Committee on Water Resources, and pointed out the importance of the Committee as a mechanism for linking the ESCWA secretariat with decision makers and water authorities and ministries in the member States. He stated that the Committee should work to reinforce regional cooperation, as increased familiarity would likely foster understanding and dialogue between the members of the Committee and the ESCWA experts and encourage the exchange of information, which would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the requirements of the region and of the resources available to ESCWA. He stressed the importance of constructive criticism in establishing sound water programmes, and concluded his statement by stating that the work of the technical committees constituted one of the most important activities of ESCWA.

18. All the members of the Committee on Water Resources acknowledged the importance of the Committee as a link between the ESCWA water programme and the concerned ministries and authorities in the ESCWA member countries. They also affirmed the importance of the opening statement of the Executive Secretary of ESCWA in which he stressed the need for continued contact between the members of the Committee and the ESCWA secretariat to ensure that the water programme remained closely linked to water issues in the region.

19. Several members of the Committee enquired about the manner in which the ESCWA medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 had been prepared and whether they could participate in amending it. The ESCWA secretariat replied that any proposed changes should be submitted to ESCWA in writing for consideration. The discussion then moved to the concept of the medium-term plan and its objectives, and the ESCWA secretariat provided the necessary clarifications in that regard. It was agreed that the members of the Committee should complete their review of the medium-term plan after returning to their home countries and should send their remarks to the ESCWA secretariat for consideration by 30 June 1998, when the medium-term plan was due for revision.

20. During the review of the current programme of work for the biennium 1996-1997 and the draft programme of work and priorities for the biennium 1998-1999, the members of the Committee noted the following:

(a) Some of the participants felt that water issues were not dealt with in a coordinated manner at the national level in most cases, and that a specific authority should be designated to deal with water issues;

(b) Many members of the Committee emphasized the importance of providing training in various fields in the water sector and stressed the need for ESCWA to carry out various activities in this respect. The ESCWA experts explained that the Commission had established the Regional Training Network in the Water

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Sector in the ESCWA Region, which included Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic as members and which had held its first meeting in 1995, and that extrabudgetary funds were being used to finance training programmes such as the Training Course on Using Remote Sensing Data and GIS Techniques and the Training Course on Farm Water Management and Rationalization. A number of Committee members recommended that the training programmes should be financed from the ESCWA budget;

(c) Some members of the Committee emphasized the importance of promoting the use of conventional and non-conventional water resources in an integrated manner, and of carrying out studies on the re-use of wastewater and on artificial groundwater recharge; it was stressed that studies also needed to be conducted on sea-water intrusion in order to prevent the salinization of fresh groundwater aquifers;

(d) Many members of the Committee suggested that meetings should be held between the countries sharing surface and groundwater basins and that related studies should be carried out so that plans could be made to develop and manage these basins and rationalize their use;

(e) Several members of the Committee enquired about the review of the impact of pricing policies on water demand that ESCWA was expected to prepare in 1997 within the framework of its subprogramme on water. The members of the Committee were provided with ample clarification on the objectives of the study, with the social aspects of the issue taken into account. The ESCWA secretariat requested the members of the Committee to provide it with information related to the study;

(f) Some members of the Committee enquired whether it was necessary to undertake the study on updating the assessment of water resources in ESCWA member countries which would be undertaken within the draft programme of work for the biennium 1998-1999. The ESCWA secretariat stated that the activity was important in view of the discrepancies in the information and figures that had been collected using traditional and non-traditional methods, which made cooperation among ESCWA experts and those of the member States and regional organizations a necessity;

(g) One of the Committee members enquired about the purpose of the study on the harmonization of environmental standards in the water sectors of ESCWA member States, to be undertaken within the framework of the draft programme of work for the biennium 1998-1999, and the ESCWA representative explained the purpose of the study and of the meeting which was to be held on the same subject. One of the Committee members then put forward a specific proposal affirming the need to implement that activity.

21. After considering the water-related activities in the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, many members of the Committee proposed activities which they felt should be included in the future programme of work for the biennium 2000-2001, the preparation of which would begin at the end of 1998. Reference was made to the fact that the Committee on Water Resources was due to hold its second session in 1999, as stated in the draft programme of work for the biennium 1998-1999, and the possibility of the Committee on Water Resources holding its meetings each year instead of every two years was raised. The ESCWA representative explained that ESCWA resolution 205 (XVIII) stipulated that the Committee on Water Resources should hold its meetings every two years, and that holding such meetings each year would entail additional costs for both the ESCWA secretariat and the member States, as the latter would have to defray the costs related to the travel of their representatives to the intergovernmental meetings convened by ESCWA. The proposals of the members of the Committee concerning the future programme of work for the biennium

2000-2001 in the medium-term plan concentrated on various activities covering several aspects of the water sector and are included among the recommendations of the present report.

22. With respect to follow-up action on the recommendations of international and regional conferences and the participation of member States in those conferences, one of the members of the Committee suggested that the ESCWA secretariat should play a guiding role, and that participation in these meetings should be effected through the ESCWA secretariat. ESCWA was requested to submit to the second session of the Committee a summary of the proceedings and recommendations of those meetings, and the ESCWA representative informed the members of the Committee that the Commission would do so for the water meetings it attended.

23. The members of the Committee held a detailed discussion on the subject of obtaining reliable information from the member States rather than relying on published general information. It was agreed that the collection of this information might take a long time, and ESCWA was asked to consider giving token rewards to those States which provided it with the needed data and information. The ESCWA representative explained that ESCWA usually sent out a questionnaire or letter requesting information and was not able to provide token rewards unless allowed for in the budget, and then only for specific purposes; when ESCWA failed to obtain the necessary information from the member States, it had to rely on published information in order to complete its studies and analyses.

24. The subject of the discussion then moved to the series of documents completed or under publication which related to regional and subregional projects. Some members of the Committee made the following remarks:

(a) These studies are useful; however, experts from the member countries, in particular those from the countries that are members of the Committee, should take part in them in order to maximize benefits and facilitate the provision of reliable information from the source;

(b) Since ESCWA is an economic and social commission, its studies should cover social aspects in addition to economic aspects; further, detailed studies on the environmental aspects of water projects should be undertaken;

(c) Some members of the Committee expressed reservations about the information contained in some of the reports and technical publications that had been published based on earlier publications by ESCWA or regional or international organizations. ESCWA agreed to publish the corrected data as soon as it received them from the members of the Committee in the form of annexes to each publication or, failing that, to include them in forthcoming studies, in particular those related to updating the assessment of water resources in ESCWA member countries which would be carried out within the draft programme of work for the biennium 1998-1999.

E. Priorities and recommendations

25. In accordance with ESCWA resolution 205 (XVIII), the Committee on Water Resources held its meeting on 30 March 1997. The resolution defined the tasks of the Committee as follows:

"(a) Participation in the establishment and formulation of priorities for programmes of work and medium-term plans in the field of water resources;

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"(b) Monitoring of developments in the field of water resources in the ESCWA member States;

"(c) Monitoring of the progress achieved in the activities of the ESCWA secretariat in the field of water resources;

"(d) Follow-up of international and regional conferences, participation of member States in them and coordination of member States' efforts in connection with the implementation of resolutions and recommendations [in the ESCWA region]."

1. Determination of priorities

26. The members of the Committee agreed that special priority should be given to the following:

(a) Promoting member States' efforts aimed at implementing programmes for the integrated management of water resources as a means of achieving sustainable development, and assisting them in formulating water policies as well as short- and long-term strategies;

(b) Developing and managing non-conventional water resources, in particular through desalination, industrial replacement, and the treatment of brackish water and wastewater, while at the same time addressing the related industrial and environmental aspects;

(c) Training technical cadres working in the water sector in order to improve their performance and ensure the continuity of their services;

(d) Strengthening cooperation between ESCWA member countries in the assessment of shared water resources, striving to promote shared management, and encouraging the exchange of information between the countries of the region;

(e) Reinforcing cooperation and coordination between regional and international organizations in the field of water resources by coordinating efforts and technical and financial resources; by undertaking shared activities, in particular those related to water supply, sanitation, and studies on the impact of solid and liquid waste on the pollution of surface and groundwater; and by exploring ways of rationalizing the use of water and reducing the wastage of water;

(f) Contributing to the assessment and development of flood water in order to use it and provide protection from it, and studying the effect of drought cycles on water resources, especially on groundwater recharge, using techniques appropriate for the conditions of the region;

(g) Undertaking specialized studies dealing with the problems of the water sector in the ESCWA member countries by providing technical assistance through regional advisers.

2. Recommendations

27. Following the presentation by ESCWA of the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, its various programmes in the water sector, and the activities which will be implemented during 1997, and those

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proposed for the biennium 1998-1999, the participants made the following recommendations in the light of the priorities established:

- (a) With regard to the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, the participants proposed that the objectives of the plan presented to the first session should be reviewed based on the explanations provided by ESCWA in that respect, before remarks were sent to ESCWA through the representative of each country in the Committee on Water Resources by 30 June 1998;
- (b) With regard to the programme of work for the biennium 1996-1997:
 - (i) The data and information should be examined thoroughly by the competent agencies in each member State so that they can be incorporated in the studies of the official agencies which work closely with the Committee on Water Resources in the concerned countries;
 - (ii) In carrying out the review of the impact of pricing policies on water demand, ESCWA should take into account the social aspects in addition to the economic aspects;
- (c) With regard to the draft programme of work and priorities for the biennium 1998-1999:
 - (i) Training in the water sector should concentrate on areas of special importance, taking into consideration the particularities of each country, and should be financed from the ESCWA budget rather than from extrabudgetary resources;
 - (ii) In connection with the recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting on Regional Water Studies held on 31 March 1997 in conjunction with the current session and in view of the absence of unified and clear-cut criteria with which to measure the performance of the main or subsidiary (service) institutions concerned with water resources in ESCWA member countries and to compare the activities that have been or will be carried out, the Committee suggested that efforts should be made, from the level of (quantitative and qualitative) resources to the level of operations, to promote the exchange of information between member States in order to create a kind of standardization in the application of administrative and technical criteria;
 - (iii) On the basis of the discussions held between the members of the Committee with regard to technical information on water resources in ESCWA member countries, and in an effort to encourage the provision of detailed and reliable information, the participants proposed that the countries that were members of the Committee on Water Resources should provide ESCWA with information taken from the country or countries covered and by studies being carried out so that discrepancies and inconsistencies in information and data could be avoided, and that, if possible, token rewards should be given for the provision of such information.
- (d) With regard to the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, the members of the Committee decided to make some recommendations related to the future programme of work and priorities for the biennium 2000-2001 that could be proposed before the second session of the Committee on Water Resources scheduled to be held in 1999. Specifically, the Committee recommended the following:

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- (i) ESCWA should concentrate its efforts on regulating water demand, applying water conservation techniques in irrigation, encouraging the preparation of training programmes, and organizing workshops with a view to increasing awareness of the importance of water and rationalizing its use;
- (ii) ESCWA should organize a meeting and undertake a study on the integrated management of available surface or groundwater resources;
- (iii) Many ESCWA member countries share surface or groundwater resources with other countries within and outside the ESCWA region. Since a law concerning the use of waterways for non-navigational purposes may be submitted to the General Assembly at its current (fifty-first) session, and in view of the importance of making ESCWA member countries aware of the laws, as well as of the customs and bilateral conventions related to shared waters, the participants proposed that a study on the laws, customs and conventions regulating the use of shared international waters should be included in the medium-term plan, as three years would have elapsed since the adoption of the law concerning the use of waterways for non-navigational purposes;
- (iv) ESCWA should promote the conservation of conventional water resources to compensate for the lack of groundwater resources and to limit the increasing use of non-conventional alternatives so that sea-water infiltration can be checked and the deterioration of freshwater quality prevented;
- (v) The Palestinian Water Authority has been carrying out the tasks entrusted to it since April 1995 in order to build the infrastructure in the water sector and has started work to provide drinking water; it has also undertaken studies on various water resources. The members of the Committee recommended that Palestinian particularities should be taken into account in the studies carried out by ESCWA and that technical assistance should be provided to the Authority within the context of the draft programme of work for the biennium 1998-1999 and the future programme of work for the biennium 2000-2001, in order to promote human resources development in the water sector as well as the integrated management of water resources at both the national and regional levels;
- (vi) The participants proposed that the Committee should hold its meetings annually instead of every two years concomitantly with one of the expert group meetings held by ESCWA each year to deal with specific issues related to the water sector. ESCWA explained that the request could not be satisfied, as ESCWA resolution 205 (XVIII) stipulated that, "starting in 1996, the Committee on Water Resources [should] hold its meetings every two years." The Committee on Water Resources also recommended that study proposals should be submitted during the Committee session so that they could be reviewed before they were adopted, and that ideas should be put forward concerning future studies.

3. Regional and subregional water studies

28. The members of the Committee made the following recommendations with regard to the regional and subregional water studies that ESCWA had published or were currently undertaking.

- (a) Those studies should cover the economic and social aspects of water-related issues, in addition to the technical aspects, and after completion they should be submitted to the concerned countries for comment;
- (b) Regional and international organizations should participate in the specialized studies carried out by ESCWA;
- (c) Detailed studies should be carried out on the environmental aspects of water projects.

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