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**ACTIVITIES OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVES AND OTHER REPRESENTATIVES
DESIGNATED BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION**

(Item 10 of the provisional agenda)

1. During the period under review (May-December 1997), the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission (ACPR) held seven regular sessions. Additionally, an Open-ended Informal Working Group was set up to assist ACPR in its work; the report of that Group is annexed to the present report.
2. ACPR discussed various topics during its sessions, including the following:
 - (a) Review of the fifty-third session of the Commission, Bangkok, 23-30 April 1997;
 - (b) Work plan of ACPR, 1997/1998;
 - (c) Preparations for and review of the Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, fourth session, Bangkok, 8-10 October 1997;
 - (d) Preparations for the following intergovernmental meetings:
 - (i) Fifth Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Social Development, Manila, 5-11 November 1997;
 - (ii) Committee on Transport and Communications, third session, Bangkok, 1-4 December 1997;
 - (iii) Meeting of Ministers of Industry and Technology, Bangkok, 19-24 February 1998;
 - (iv) Special Body on Pacific Island Developing Countries, fifth session, Bangkok, 14 and 15 April 1998
 - (e) Implementation of resolutions and major decisions of the Commission at its fifty-third session, and the progress reports thereon;
 - (f) Review of the implementation of the programme of work:

Subprogramme 1:	Regional economic cooperation
Subprogramme 2:	Environment and sustainable development
Subprogramme 3:	Poverty alleviation through economic growth and social development
Subprogramme 4:	Transport and communications
Subprogramme 5:	Statistics
Subprogramme 6:	Least developed, landlocked and island developing countries
 - (g) Preliminary assessment of the organizational, staffing and financial implications of the revision of the intergovernmental structure subsidiary to the Commission;
 - (h) Preparations for the fifty-fourth session of the Commission, tentative date and duration, modality for conducting the Ministerial Segment, provisional agenda, annotated provisional agenda and timetable, draft resolutions, and review of progress in preparations for the theme study and panel discussion topic for the session.

3. At its first session following the fifty-third session of the Commission, ACPR attributed the success of the Commission session to the extensive preparatory work undertaken in 1996 and held the view that the number of working days could be reduced. ACPR observed that the informal consultative meetings were beneficial to least developed and landlocked countries and Pacific island countries and should be continued and extended to disadvantaged countries with economies in transition. ACPR also reviewed the outcome of the Special Bodies on Pacific island countries and least developed and landlocked countries.

4. In reviewing the programme budget for 1998-1999, ACPR expressed its support for the reinforcement of inter-agency collaboration, especially through the Regional Inter-agency Committee for Asia and the Pacific. ACPR members noted the Commission's contribution to the international community and to the needs of the member countries, especially the disadvantaged economies in transition in Central Asia, through the provision of technical assistance and advisory services in the areas of macroeconomic reform, transport, trade and investment. ACPR supported strengthening the role of the secretariat in those areas, particularly with regard to least developed, landlocked and island developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

5. During its annual review of the implementation of the programme of work, 1996-1997, ACPR members requested a comparative analysis of the use of resources over several biennia as the rate of implementation between the units was not equal. The delegations identified a number of areas for priority attention in the work programme, including interregional and subregional economic and technical cooperation, the promotion of environmentally sound technology, the promotion of sustainable urban and rural development, the reduction of natural disasters and the extended application of space technologies. ACPR commended the catalytic role that the secretariat continued to play in many sectors in its efforts to comply with the mandates and complete the programmed activities, particularly in the preparation of comprehensive and well-designed background documents. The qualitative assessment of project achievements was appreciated.

6. The secretariat reported on the implementation of resolutions and other major decisions of the fifty-third session of the Commission and provided ACPR members with more specific information regarding some activities and on the impact of those activities, as they had requested. ACPR noted, in particular, the efficient organization of meetings, the use of the Internet for dissemination of information, the use of space technology applications and interregional project implementation. ACPR was also pleased to learn that coordination with other agencies and non-governmental organizations was ongoing in the field of exploitation of children.

7. In the review of the fourth session of the Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, ACPR recognized the improved organization of the session and noted that the panel discussion had contributed significantly to the success of the session. The members requested that the procedure for deciding on the agenda items at future Committee sessions should be reviewed and pointed

out that more advance planning was necessary. The decrease in the number of senior government representatives was noted with concern. The decisions concerning regional cooperation in the area of sustainable development were particularly welcomed.

8. The conclusions and recommendations of the Open-ended Informal Working Group of ACPR with regard to the modalities of the Commission session were endorsed by ACPR. The representatives concluded that the duration of the Senior Officials Segment of Commission sessions could be reduced by one day. It was proposed that an informal panel discussion should be held during the Ministerial Segment to enable Heads of Delegations to interact on a topical subject. It was decided that Governments should be encouraged to submit draft resolutions before the Commission session, where possible, to allow for timely review and discussion by ACPR and to reduce the workload during the Commission session. In addressing the time constraints experienced during the Ministerial Segment, Heads of Delegations were requested to limit their oral presentations, circulating written speeches where necessary. Further to Commission resolution 53/1 of 30 April 1997, the Group also made recommendations on the oversight and monitoring role of ACPR and on the assistance given to subsidiary bodies of the Commission. Attention was given to the publications programme and documentation prepared by the secretariat. The report of the Group is annexed to the present report.

9. The present report covers the activities of ACPR for the period from May to December 1997. A report on its activities during the first three months of 1998 will be issued as an addendum.

**REPORT OF THE OPEN-ENDED INFORMAL WORKING GROUP OF THE
ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES
AND OTHER REPRESENTATIVES DESIGNATED BY
MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION**

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Recognizing the important role of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission (ACPR) in assisting the secretariat in discharging its tasks and taking into account the role of ACPR in formulating recommendations on the reform of ESCAP, the Commission, at its fifty-third session held at Bangkok from 23 to 30 April 1997, recommended that ACPR should continue to work closely with the secretariat in improving its oversight and monitoring functions relating to the implementation of the programme of work, and also in developing a more transparent programme budget for ESCAP.

2. As part of that exercise, the Commission recommended that ACPR should review the documentation and publications programme of the secretariat, and also determine how to assist the subsidiary committees of the Commission in focusing their work. ACPR was also requested to undertake a review of issues relating to the conduct of the Commission session that included the possibility of further reducing the number of meeting days of the annual sessions of the Commission from the current seven days; drawing up a focused agenda for the annual Commission sessions; prescribing a deadline for the submission of draft resolutions to the Commission; and the holding of informal consultations among Heads of Delegations or panel discussions with outside experts in the Ministerial Segment. The interrelationship between the issues dealt with by the three thematic committees should also be addressed. Given those assignments, ACPR needed to assess how its workload could best be streamlined so that it could concentrate on specific issues as required by the Commission.

3. Recognizing that the regular ACPR sessions would not allow in-depth discussions on those issues, owing to time constraints, ACPR, at its two hundred and fifteenth session, held on 15 May 1997, decided to set up an Open-ended Informal Working Group to examine each of the issues individually. The Working Group held its first session on 27 May 1997 and has held seven sessions in all. The following recommendations were adopted.

II. OVERSEEING AND MONITORING THE PROGRAMME OF ESCAP

4. Efforts to improve the oversight and monitoring functions of ACPR included a review of the implementation of the programme of work and the allocation of resources for the secretariat.

Recommendation

5. ACPR should make efforts to improve its oversight and monitoring functions by reviewing the implementation of the programme of work and the allocation of resources. ACPR should work with the secretariat towards providing more informative and transparent reports on the programme budget, indicating overall trends over several years. Resources allocated to priority areas and issues, in particular those relating to least developed, landlocked and Pacific island developing countries, should be clearly stated in a comprehensive and transparent manner. Resources allocated to core activities, coordination activities, and professional and support staff should also be reflected over an extended number of years to facilitate a comparative analysis on the utilization and justification of allocations.

6. Within the framework of reporting required by the United Nations system, reports on the implementation of activities under the programme of work could contain qualitative evaluations to reflect the effectiveness of activities, as well as impact assessments, to the extent possible.

III. ASSISTING THE SUBSIDIARY COMMITTEES OF THE COMMISSION IN FOCUSING THEIR WORK

7. The importance of selecting fewer interrelated topics for consideration in any particular session of the legislative committees was recognized in order to facilitate focused discussion. In that regard, the need was emphasized to give due consideration to the rotation of sectoral subtopics under the purview of each of the Committees and cross-sectoral issues to ensure that all sectors were accorded adequate priority and attention, particularly in the revised conference structure with reduced duration. Recognizing that the representatives participating in a given session of the Committee belonging to a particular sector might not be in a position to recommend the agendas for subsequent sessions which would be considering other sectoral issues, the members held the view that ACPR would be the best forum to discuss, in detail, the draft provisional agenda for the legislative committees and to take an impartial view in recommending items to the Commission for consideration and approval.

Recommendations

8. Broad parameters regarding the modality for the conduct of committee sessions should be established with a view to sharpening the focus of the deliberations.

9. The usefulness of concentrating on selected issues of priority and of rotating them to ensure high-level representation and in-depth deliberations was reiterated. The secretariat should continue to propose draft provisional agendas of the legislative committees for consideration by member governments through ACPR. Member governments should review and decide on the specific issues of priority.

10. The secretariat should prepare supporting documents, highlighting the issues proposed for consideration and providing the background, rationale and justifications, together with the order of priorities, in the format previously recommended in Working Paper No. 3 submitted to the Working

Group at its third session on 23 July 1997, entitled Determining how to assist the subsidiary committees of the Commission in focusing their work . The secretariat should give due consideration to the rotation of topics under the purview of the respective committees, and to cross-sectoral issues as well.

11. ACPR was considered the best forum to discuss and make recommendations on the draft provisional agendas of the legislative committees. The legislative committees should assist the secretariat by identifying and listing priority issues and concerns in the respective sectors, for consideration and approval by the Commission. Draft provisional agendas should be submitted in sufficient time to allow ACPR members to consult their respective governments and to deliberate on the issues.

12. Panel discussions could be included in Committee sessions to make the deliberations more interactive. Member governments might make suggestions regarding the names of potential panellists. The secretariat should notify ACPR of the names of proposed panellists before final selection.

IV. REVIEWING DOCUMENTATION AND THE PUBLICATIONS PROGRAMME

13. The objective of undertaking the exercise to review the publications programme of ESCAP was to ensure optimal utilization of the resources of ESCAP, particularly taking due note of the fact that 30 per cent of the regular budget work-months in the 1996-1997 ESCAP programme budget was utilized for publications. While members took note of the progressive reduction in the number of documents and publications, further rationalization was recommended to ensure availability of more resources for other substantive programme of work. However, the members stressed that such rationalization should be in a need-based manner, with due consideration being given to the importance of documents and publications as part of the work of ESCAP.

Recommendations

14. Clear objectives of the publications and identification of the relevant target groups of recipients should be made to ensure that publications served their purpose.

15. The secretariat was urged to initiate readership surveys for each and every publication, by circulating a questionnaire prescribing a cut-off date for reply, and addressing letters to the seats of governments, and to the Permanent Missions to ensure timely response.

16. There was a need for a mechanism to monitor and oversee the publications programme to ensure that the policy guidelines of the secretariat were followed. In that regard, reference was made to the existence of an ESCAP Publications Committee, which had not met for a long time. It was recommended that it should be reconstituted to take a holistic view of the publications programme of all ESCAP divisions and to look into the following aspects in particular:

- ☞ Scrutiny of the readership survey responses

- 👉 Scrutiny of the contents of publications and documents to avoid unnecessary duplication
- 👉 Exploration of the feasibility of divisions of the secretariat using desk-top publishing, which had cost advantages
- 👉 Possible utilization of printers outside Bangkok in a cost-effective manner
- 👉 Removal of the procedural hurdles faced by divisions in entering into contracts with commercial publishers.

17. Members also recommended exploring the possibility of disseminating data and information, including some smaller publications such as newsletters and bulletins, through electronic media, including the Internet and e-mail, subject, however, to the receiving capability and accessibility of the recipient organizations or countries concerned.

18. The secretariat should make every effort to streamline documentation. Key issues and priority concerns should be highlighted to assist representatives in preparing for ESCAP meetings. Qualitative assessment of the activities under implementation and the lessons to be learnt for the future should be included. The layout and format of the documents should be modified to render the documents user-friendly. The provision of summaries, with special reference to tables, footnotes, graphic presentations, references to previous publications and documents, and appendices, was considered useful and beneficial to readers.

V. REVIEWING THE CONDUCT OF THE COMMISSION SESSIONS

Duration

19. Keeping in view the need for further streamlining of the organization of the Commission session and the savings accrued therefrom, a general consensus emerged in favour of reducing the duration of the Commission session from the present seven days to six days. It was further agreed that the reduction in duration would be effected in the Senior Officials Segment of the Commission, which would last for three days.

20. On the duration of the Ministerial Segment, it was felt that, considering that there were mandatory and unavoidable sessions of inauguration and closing ceremonies, and that a meeting was required to adopt the report, there was no scope for reduction of the duration. It was accordingly agreed that the Ministerial Segment should continue to be held for the same duration.

Agenda

21. ACPR should continue to discuss and recommend the provisional and annotated provisional agenda for the Commission sessions at its regular sessions.

22. The secretariat was urged to prepare a more focused annotated provisional agenda, clearly indicating the important areas on which the delegations would be expected to respond or comment, in

Panel

23. With a view to encouraging more substantive and interactive exchange of views at the Ministerial Segment of the Commission, the Working Group recommended that panel discussions should be introduced during the Ministerial Segment to promote interactive dialogues. The Working Group concluded that, for the first session, one panel would be appropriate.

24. After considerable deliberation on the feasibility of the new practice, it was recommended that, to start with, one panel discussion, on a topic chosen in advance by ACPR based on the theme topic for the session, could be conducted in one session of the Ministerial Segment of the fifty-fourth Commission session. The panel discussion should be organized on a year-by-year basis and should not be institutionalized. The topic for the panel discussion should be decided by consensus. For steering and setting the tone for discussions, outside regional experts could be invited by the secretariat, in consultation with the concerned member governments, giving due consideration to, *inter alia*, their expertise in the topic chosen for discussion and close association with ESCAP activities in the past. One session of the Ministerial Segment should be set apart for the panel discussion.

25. The secretariat should make necessary provisions for ensuring simultaneous interpretation during the panel session. A summary of the discussions and/or outcome should be prepared and circulated separately for comment and the records of the member governments. The summary would not constitute a part of the main report of the Commission.

26. The conduct of panel discussions for future sessions and the possibility of increasing the number of panels and topics could be reviewed based on the experience at the fifty-fourth Commission session.

27. The Working Group emphasized that the topic for the panel should be selected early and advised to Member States at least 30 days before the session to allow adequate preparation by their delegations. Additional documentation, if necessary, should be available well in advance so that the countries could thoroughly study it, leading to meaningful and fruitful panel discussions.

Policy statements by Heads of Delegations

28. The majority of the members wished to continue the existing system of oral presentations of policy statements by Heads of Delegations. However, members recognized the need for compliance to a stipulated time limit. In view of the fact that one session would be set aside for panel discussion, it was recommended that the time limit for oral presentations should be 7 minutes.

29. The Working Group proposed that prepared speeches should be circulated in written form and that a summary presentation should be made by Heads of Delegations. The Working Group recommended that representatives of other bodies and organizations with the right to speak should be advised of the strict time limit for delivering their speeches.

Submission of draft resolutions

30. Recognizing the need to allow adequate lead time for member countries to consider draft resolutions prior to presentation to the Commission, it was recommended that draft resolutions should normally be submitted at least two months in advance of the Commission. That would facilitate discussion of draft resolutions in at least two of the regular sessions of ACPR. Past experience had shown that such consideration by ACPR facilitated discussions at the Commission session, leading to further streamlining of its conduct and improvement in the quality of the resolutions adopted. The secretariat would continue to prepare the budgetary/financial implications of their implementation. While duly recognizing the sovereign right of the member countries to present a resolution at the Commission session on important or emergent issues that might arise subsequently, it was recommended that late submission of resolutions should be avoided.

31. In his invitation letter to member countries to participate in the session of the Commission, the Executive Secretary should indicate that draft resolutions should normally be submitted at least two months in advance of the session. Late submission should be avoided whenever possible.

VI. CONCLUSION

32. The recommendations of the Open-ended Informal Working Group are submitted to ACPR for consideration and adoption. They will be included in the report of ACPR to the fifty-fourth session of the Commission to be convened from 16 to 22 April 1998.