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Decentralization of economic and social activities to,
and the strengthening of, the regional commissions

The Commission adopted at its seventh session resolution 80 (VII) entitled "The restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system", which called upon the Executive Secretary to:

(a) Pursue, in collaboration with other regional commissions, his consultations with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, with a view to obtaining the resources required for carrying out the activities already identified by the secretariat as resulting from the increased responsibilities of the Commission in the light of General Assembly resolution 32/197;

(b) Complete the identification of the activities to be carried out by the Commission within the context of the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system;

(c) Report to the Commission at its eighth session on the progress achieved in the further decentralization of activities to, and the strengthening of, the Commission.

Pursuant to these requests, the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with the Executive Secretaries of the other regional commissions, pursued his consultations with the Secretary General of the United Nations, whose report to the General Assembly (A/35/546) is issued, for information, under cover of an addendum to the present document. This report, entitled "Implications of General Assembly resolutions 32/197 and 33/202 for the regional commissions", identifies, for ECWA, in section III, immediate programme priorities in the areas of programme planning and co-ordination and transport integration that **should** be stressed. In this connexion, the General Assembly at its thirty-fifth session approved one P-2 post and its ancillary costs in programme planning for 1981 and adopted in December 1980 the following decision (35/440) in three parts:

- "(a) To take note of the report of the Secretary-General on the implications of General Assembly resolutions 32/197 of 20 December 1977 and 33/202 of 29 January 1979 for the regional commissions;^{1/}
- "(b) To endorse those immediate programme priorities for 1981 which the regional commissions have approved;^{2/}
- "(c) To invite the regional commissions to consider further, at their plenary sessions in 1981, the implications for their role and functions of General Assembly resolutions 32/197 and 33/202, in the light, inter alia, of the observations and recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General, particularly paragraphs 76 to 79 thereof, and to report thereon, for action by the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session, through the Economic and Social Council, in the context of its consideration of the report of the Secretary-General called for under General Assembly resolution 34/206 of 19 December 1979".

^{1/} A/35/546.

^{2/} Ibid, sect. III.

Paragraph 26 of section IV of the annex to Assembly resolution 32/197 (section IV is reproduced in the annex to the present document) that "in order to enable the regional commissions effectively to discharge the responsibilities indicated in the preceding paragraphs (paras. 19-25 of the annex), the necessary authority should be delegated to them and to the same end, adequate budgetary and financial provision should be made for their activities". In this connexion, the report of the Secretary-General identifies five principal areas in which the role and functions of the regional commissions deserve special consideration (A/35/546, para. 77). These areas involve (a) the functional relations of the regional commissions with the United Nations intergovernmental structures at the global level, (b) the exercise by the commissions of team leadership and responsibility for co-operation and co-ordination within the United Nations system at the regional level, (c) the participation of the regional commissions in programme planning, (d) the responsibility of the commissions in promoting regional co-operation outside the United Nations system and (e) access by the commissions to information and expertise available in various parts of the United Nations system.

The Commission has already given consideration at its sixth and seventh sessions,^{3/} to those issues identified by the report of the Secretary-General. However, the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system implies a further expansion of the functions and responsibilities of ECWA as "a main regional economic and social development centre".

Within the restructuring framework, the role of ECWA in relation to global intergovernmental bodies requires greater interaction and co-ordination between regional

^{3/} See "the role of the regional commissions in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 32/197 and resolution 1978/74 of the Economic and Social Council" (E/ECWA/79 and "Decentralization of economic and social activities to, and the strengthening of, the regional commissions" (E/ECWA/92).

and global activities, as well as between regional and global policy-making bodies. Consequently, ECWA needs to improve and strengthen its capacity for data collection, research and analysis in support of and in response to intergovernmental action at both the regional and the global level.^{4/} ECWA also has to cope with an expanding range of operative tasks,^{5/} such as the provision of advisory services, executing agency and institution-building responsibilities, the convening of specialized meetings and training workshops, the preparation of proposals for regional intercountry activities funded by donor countries and agencies and the establishment or strengthening of co-operative arrangements with the specialized agencies. Furthermore, ECWA has to play a leading role in undertaking a number of institutional measures to facilitate such co-operation including (a) the setting up of specialized subsidiary organs of the Commission (since the Commission does not yet have any such standing organs), (b) the promotion of regional interagency co-operation and co-ordination, and (c) fuller participation by ECWA in the subsidiary machinery of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) and in global interagency co-ordination.

^{4/} The Secretary-General's report lists a number of measures to enhance further the contribution of the commissions to the global policy-making machinery. These measures include:

- (a) The utilization of the commissions' structure for the preparation of intergovernmental consultations at the global level, including special conferences organized or sponsored by the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council (A/35/546, para. 37);
- (b) The provision of special assistance to Governments of member States of the regional commissions for specific negotiation purposes (*ibid.*, para. 38);
- (c) Consultations, at the secretariat level, between Headquarters and the regional commissions regarding the modalities of the implementation of resolutions adopted by legislative bodies at the centre and in the regions, with a view to determining the most effective implementation of these resolutions (*ibid.*, para. 39);
- (d) A strengthening of the data collection and analysis capacities of the regional secretariats, so as to expand the range and quality of services offered by them in support of United Nations programmes at both the regional and the global level (*ibid.*, para. 40).

^{5/} In this connexion, the provisions of the General Assembly resolutions on restructuring regarding the status of the regional commissions as executing agencies are of particular relevance (see para. 23 of the annex to resolution 32/197 and para. 3 of section V of resolution 33/202).

Within the context of co-operation among developing countries, in which the whole United Nations development system is engaged, further initiatives in terms of interagency co-operation and co-ordination, particularly among the regional commissions, need to be taken. In this respect, a full account of ECWA activities and efforts during 1980 has been given in the ECWA report on co-operation among developing countries (E/ECWA/124). A mechanism for co-ordination and co-operation among the regional commissions for the promotion of technical and economic co-operation among developing countries at the interregional level is yet to be explored, in order to ensure the exchange of information and experience and the development of specific projects for co-operation on a regular basis. Thus, the efficient promotion of technical and economic co-operation among the developing countries at all levels (regional, subregional and interregional) calls for the strengthening of the ECWA machinery for co-operation and co-ordination, as well as that of the substantive programmes and activities of ECWA, which contribute to the promotion of such co-operation.

With respect to programme planning, the Commission decided in paragraph 1 of its resolution 84 (VII) to establish an Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Expert Committee. This Committee is scheduled to be convened at Beirut from 13 to 17 April 1981 to discuss issues pertaining to programme priorities, the Medium-term Plan for 1984-1989 and institutional arrangements, including the creation of technical bodies, for the effective implementation of the plan. The recommendations of this Committee will be considered by ECWA at its ninth session.

In addition to its new responsibilities in support of this Committee, the functions of ECWA in programme planning and execution have grown substantially in recent years to include a number of diverse tasks which have been recognized in the Secretary-General's report (A/35/546, para. 94).

There is no doubt that the capacity of the Commission to draw on information and expertise available at the secretariat level in different parts of the United Nations system, including the specialized bodies, needs

to be enhanced. However, this requires a revision of the patterns of information flow and exchange of expertise within the system.

The Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) at its twentieth session, recommended the immediate analysis of an improved distribution of tasks and responsibilities between the regional ~~commissions~~ and the rest of the United Nations development system in human settlements,^{6/} the environment and water, and the General Assembly subsequently approved that the analysis should be carried out. In the light of the aforementioned considerations, the following priority areas are also recommended for analysis by CPC:

- (a) Development planning;
- (b) Ocean economics and technology;
- (c) Integrated transport;
- (d) Science and technology;
- (e) Statistics;
- (f) Cartography;
- (g) Trade;
- (h) Information and documentation services;
- (i) Population.

The restructuring process has made heavy demands on the financial resources of the Commission. While General Assembly resolution 32/197 recognizes, in paragraph 26 of the annex thereto, that adequate budgetary and financial provision should be made for the activities carried out by the commissions pursuant to their strengthened or expanded mandates, sufficient measures have not yet been taken. A full analysis of the long-term budgetary implications of the restructuring process for the regional commissions has not been undertaken. However, the Secretary-General's report recognizes a number of considerations pertaining to regular budget allocation and extrabudgetary contributions. The ECWA secretariat endorses the recommendations set forth in that report and feels strongly that the analysis of budgetary implications arising from the distribution of tasks and responsibilities should not be delayed.

^{6/} On the basis of further consultations with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), this programme was excluded.

Annex

SECTION IV OF THE ANNEX TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 32/197

" IV. STRUCTURES FOR REGIONAL AND INTERREGIONAL
CO-OPERATION

19. The regional commissions should be enabled fully to play their role under the authority of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council as the main general economic and social development centres within the United Nations system for their respective regions, having due regard to the responsibilities of the specialized agencies and other United Nations bodies in specific sectoral fields and the co-ordinating role of the United Nations Development Programme in respect of technical co-operation activities.
20. Taking into account the special needs and conditions of their respective regions, they should exercise team leadership and responsibility for co-ordination and co-operation at the regional level. They may convene periodic meetings, as necessary, for the purpose of improving the co-ordination of the relevant economic and social activities of the United Nations system in their respective regions.
21. The regional commissions should provide inputs for the global policy-making processes of the competent United Nations organs and should participate fully in the implementation of the relevant policy and programme decisions taken by these organs. They should be consulted on the definition of the objectives to be included in the Medium-term Plan of the United Nations covering fields of interest to them, taking into account the special needs and conditions of their respective regions.
22. Subject to such guidance as may be provided by the Governments concerned and without prejudice to membership of the regional bodies concerned, the organizations of the United Nations system should take early steps to achieve a common definition of regions and subregions and the identical location of regional and subregional offices.

23. Relations between regional commissions and the organizations of the United Nations system should be strengthened. Close co-operation with the United Nations Development Programme should be established and appropriate arrangements made to enable the regional commissions to participate actively in operational activities carried out through the United Nations system, including the preparation of intercountry programmes, as may be required, in their respective regions. Without prejudice to the special needs and conditions of each region, and taking into account the plans and priorities of the Governments concerned, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council should take measures to enable them to function expeditiously as executing agencies for intersectoral, subregional regional and interregional projects and, in areas which do not fall within the purview of the sectoral responsibilities of specialized agencies and other United Nations bodies, for other subregional, regional and interregional projects.

24. The regional commissions concerned should assist developing countries at the request of the Governments concerned in identifying projects and preparing programmes for the promotion of co-operation among those countries. Taking fully into account the relevant global policy decisions of the competent United Nations organs, the regional commissions concerned should intensify their efforts, with the assistance of the competent organizations of the United Nations system and at the request of the Governments concerned, to strengthen and enlarge economic co-operation among the developing countries at the subregional, regional and interregional levels.

25. As a means of promoting more effective interregional co-operation, the regional commissions should strengthen and, as appropriate, expand existing arrangements for the continuous exchange between them of information and experience. Such arrangements may include the holding of periodic intersecretariat meetings, utilizing existing machinery as far as possible for that purpose.

26. In order to enable the regional commissions effectively to discharge the responsibilities indicated in the preceding paragraphs, the necessary authority should be delegated to them and, to the same end, adequate budgetary and financial provision should be made for their activities.

27. Taking into account the special needs and conditions of their respective regions and bearing in mind the objectives set forth above, the regional commissions should rationalize their structures, inter alia, by streamlining their subsidiary machinery".