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Fifty-fifth session

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Bangkok

**DATE, VENUE AND ANY OTHER SUBJECT PERTAINING TO THE  
FIFTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION**

(Item 11 of the provisional agenda)

*Note by the secretariat*

**SUMMARY**

The present note contains information on the date and venue of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission and offers a number of suggestions for the theme topic for the session, keeping in view the deliberations on the subject by the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission.



#### **A. Date and venue**

1. With regard to the date and venue of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission, the Commission will recall that rule 1 of the rules of procedure of the Commission requires the Commission to recommend the date and venue of its next session, subject to the approval of the Economic and Social Council and in consultation with the Secretary-General. It has been the practice for the Commission at each of its sessions to recommend that the next session should be held in March or April of the following year. The actual dates and venue are then determined by the Executive Secretary in consultation with the member Governments and the Chairperson of the Commission.

2. Following this practice, the secretariat recommends that the fifty-sixth session of the Commission should be held in April 2000, after the Thai public holidays in the middle of the month. Rule 1 of the rules of procedure also states that Commission sessions should ordinarily be held at the office of the United Nations in Asia and the Pacific, unless the Commission recommends otherwise. Subject to further views of the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission (ACPR) on the matter, it is proposed that the fifty-sixth session should be held at the United Nations Conference Centre in Bangkok.

3. The fifty-sixth session of the Commission, to be held in 2000, will constitute the millennium session. It will offer an important opportunity to take stock of developments in the region and to chart a vision for the future direction of Asia and the Pacific. In this connection, it would be desirable for delegations from member countries to be headed at the ministerial level.

#### **B. Theme topic**

4. At its fifty-fourth session, the Commission decided that the theme topic of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission would be: Asia and the Pacific into the twenty-first century: information technology, globalization, economic security and development . The theme topic study appears in part two of the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 1999* and is summarized in document E/ESCAP/1120.

5. The theme topic of the fifty-sixth session should, ideally, address issues with which member States are preoccupied as they enter the new millennium. Clearly, the Asian financial crisis and its repercussions have been a source of major concern for countries of the region in the last months of the present millennium and will no doubt persist into the twenty-first century.

6. The following topics are put forward for the Commission's consideration. The first three topics are suggested by the secretariat, with the rationale for these suggestions being provided below. The remaining topics were recommended by representatives of concerned countries at ACPR meetings held prior to the Commission. The topics are:

- (a) Globalization and interdependence: progress through partnership;
- (b) Urbanization: towards a new urban contract;
- (c) Natural resources in Asia and the Pacific: perspectives for development in the twenty-first century;
- (d) Integrating developing countries into the multilateral trading system: issues, challenges and options;
- (e) Development through globalization and partnership: integrating developing countries and economies in transition in international financial and trading systems;
- (f) Poverty alleviation and mitigation of the social problems of poverty;
- (g) Socio-economic impacts of globalization;
- (h) Strengthening the important role of ESCAP in the economic cooperation and social development of the Asian and Pacific region in the twenty-first century.

7. With respect to topic (a), Globalization and interdependence: progress through partnership , it may be noted that recent decades have witnessed a phenomenal increase in interdependence among countries, mediated by rapid growth in cross-border movement of goods, services, technology, capital and, to a lesser extent, labour. Advances in information technology have provided a strong stimulus to the process which has come to be characterized as globalization. It has opened up immense opportunities for developing countries, particularly by relaxing the constraints on limited domestic markets and by increasing access to international capital flows. The process, however, has also posed a number of challenges. These include the following:

(a) Not all segments of the population within countries have participated in or benefited equally from the fruits of development, leading to increased inequality within and among countries. For the countries of the Asian and Pacific region, an area of critical concern is the right to development, encompassing the right to basic necessities including adequate nutrition, shelter, sanitation, clean drinking water and basic education, and the right to participate in the development process;

(b) A very limited number of developing countries have been able to participate effectively in globalization. The gap between developed and developing countries has widened, and the differentiation among developing countries has increased;

(c) Developing countries which were able to take advantage of the benefits yielded by participation in globalization have become highly vulnerable to sudden shocks. As the recent crisis in Asia has shown, many of the gains achieved through years of hard work can be virtually wiped out in a short space of time;

(d) The volatility in key parameters of international economic relations such as interest and exchange rates has become magnified in terms of frequency as well as intensity;

(e) The severity and speed of the contagion have increased. A crisis in one country rapidly engulfs neighbouring countries and its impact is felt far beyond that country's national border.

8. While individual countries can adopt a variety of measures to reduce their vulnerability to a crisis and mitigate its impact, such measures cannot be effective on their own. Given that interdependence has intensified and that, in many circumstances, the causes of a crisis may lie in factors beyond the control of an individual country, strong partnership among countries is a vital necessity to revive the shattered economies in the region, maximize the potential benefits of globalization while minimizing its negative consequences, and bring about a more equitable distribution of those benefits within and across countries. The Commission could deliberate on the modalities for strengthening partnership at both regional and global levels in the economic and social field in such areas as trade, financial flows and the promotion of strategies to ensure the participation of the poor and other marginalized social groups in the development process.

9. For topic (b), *Urbanization: towards a new urban contract*, it may be noted that, by 2020, an additional 1.1 billion people will be added to the urban centres of Asia. In other words, cities and towns of the region will have to accommodate roughly 150,000 additional people every day for the next 21 years. The urgency of meeting this challenge was recognized regionally through the adoption by the Commission of the Regional Action Plan on Urbanization prepared by the Ministerial Conference on Urbanization in Asia and the Pacific, held at Bangkok in 1993, and globally through the adoption of the Habitat Agenda at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held at Istanbul in 1996.

10. In the light of the above, it would be timely for the Commission not only to review the progress made in implementing the Habitat Agenda and the Regional Action Plan on Urbanization but also to discuss innovative approaches to meeting the major social challenges posed by urbanization.

11. Topic (c), *Natural resources in Asia and the Pacific: perspectives for development in the twenty-first century*, is expected to contribute to building up the regional partnership as part of the global partnership towards long-term sustainable development as enunciated by the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session, held in June 1997 (resolution S/19-2 of 28 June 1997).

12. In reviewing the progress of the implementation of Agenda 21, the General Assembly pledged, in paragraph 5 of resolution S/19-2, to continue to work together, in good faith and in the spirit of partnership, to accelerate the implementation of Agenda 21. It further pointed out, in paragraph 9, that conditions in natural habitats and fragile ecosystems, including mountain ecosystems, are still deteriorating in all regions of the world, resulting in diminishing biological diversity. At the global level, renewable resources, in particular fresh water, forests, topsoil and marine fish stocks, continue to be used at rates beyond their viable rates of regeneration; without improved management, this situation is clearly unsustainable.

13. The General Assembly particularly recommended, in paragraph 24 of the resolution, that by the year 2002, the formulation and elaboration of national strategies for sustainable development... should be completed in all countries, with assistance provided, as appropriate, through international cooperation, taking into account the special needs of the least developed countries. Strategic approaches to natural resources management are increasingly being developed to ensure that appropriate strategies can be implemented. At the turn of the century, it is high time to reinvigorate this process for the region. ESCAP can enhance its catalytic role in stimulating the process of a shared vision for long-term development towards a strong and attractive programme of action for the twenty-first century.

14. This topic would offer a timely opportunity to reassess the policies of countries in the region in the sustainable development of their natural resources with a view to recommending appropriate measures to be incorporated in the formulation and elaboration of national strategies considering increasing population and economic pressures. Through this theme topic, ESCAP would be in a better position to contribute to the success of its planned fourth ministerial conference on environment and development in Asia and the Pacific, to be held in 2000.

15. The following list shows the theme topics of past sessions of the Commission:

Session	Year	Theme topic
40	1984	Technology for development
41	1985	Implementation of the Tokyo Programme on Technology for Development in Asia and the Pacific
42	1986	Human resources development in Asia and the Pacific: its technological dimensions
43	1987	Human resources development in Asia and the Pacific: policy options
44	1988	Human resources development in Asia and the Pacific: ESCAP integrated plan of action
45	1989	Restructuring the developing ESCAP economies in the 1990s

46	1990	Restructuring the developing ESCAP economies in the 1990s
47	1991	Industrial restructuring in Asia and the Pacific, in particular with a view to strengthening regional cooperation
48	1992	Regional economic cooperation in the ESCAP region: prospects, priorities and policy options
49	1993	Expansion of investment and intraregional trade as a vehicle for enhancing regional economic cooperation and development in Asia and the Pacific
50	1994	Infrastructure development as key to economic growth and regional economic cooperation
51	1995	Strengthening regional cooperation in human resources development with special reference to the social implications of sustainable economic growth in Asia and the Pacific
52	1996	Poverty alleviation and sustainable development
53	1997	Asia and the Pacific into the twenty-first century: opportunities and challenges for ESCAP
54	1998	Asia and the Pacific into the twenty-first century: prospects for social development
55	1999	Asia and the Pacific into the twenty-first century: information technology, globalization, economic security and development

16. The Commission is requested to consider and offer its views on the choice of a theme topic for the fifty-sixth session of the Commission. It is suggested that, as per past practice, the Working Group on Draft Resolutions could be entrusted with the work of assisting the Commission in choosing the theme topic.