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PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 35th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,  
on Monday, 20 July 1998, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. SOMAVIA (Chile)

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REGIONAL COOPERATION (continued)

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Corrections to this record should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

REGIONAL COOPERATION (continued) (E/1998/11, E/1998/12, E/1998/13, E/1998/14, E/1998/15 and E.1998/65 and Add.1-3)

Mr. AMOAKO (Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)) speaking as current coordinator of the regional commissions, introduced the report of the Secretary-General on regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields (E/1998/65 and Add.1-3) and drew the attention of the Council to the summaries of the regional economic surveys contained in documents E/1998/11-15.

In introducing the report, he expressed the Secretary-General's strong belief that the regional commissions had an important role to play in enhancing the overall performance of the United Nations in the economic and social sectors, as a result of their dual role as integral parts of the Organization and as parts of the institutional landscape of their respective regions. The Secretary-General's report also made recommendations which would build on the reform measures undertaken by each commission, optimizing their contribution to the promotion of development, international cooperation and better interaction between the Economic and Social Council and the regional commissions, so that the global and regional aspects of development could be harmonized in a complementary fashion to provide substantive support to the Council.

Addendum 1 provided an update on the commissions' reform efforts and described the leadership shown by the commissions in establishing programme priorities, streamlining their organizational structures and enhancing productivity and efficiency. The Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) had welcomed those reform efforts and endorsed revisions to the commissions' programmes in the current medium-term plan.

Addendum 1 also contained a section entitled "Trends and activities", including follow-up to recent global conferences, which highlighted the commissions' activities during the preceding year to foster regional cooperation. As the regional expression of United Nations economic and social activities, the commissions had some common functions such as policy analysis,

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technical assistance and discussion of key regional issues, yet each commission also had a unique regional character reflected in the specificity of its activities. The commissions continued to work towards follow-up and implementation at the regional level of the commitments emanating from recent global conferences, a role which had been discussed during the recent dialogue between the Council and the executive secretaries.

On behalf of the Secretary-General and his colleagues, the executive secretaries, he would welcome the views and guidance of the Council with a view to improving the contributions and relevance of the regional commissions within a reformed United Nations.

Ms. SINGGIH (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, highlighted the role of the regional commissions in the economic and social activities of the United Nations system, a role which had increased significantly with globalization. The regional commissions were necessary in order to ensure that globalization helped rather than hindered economies in the respective regions, and she welcomed the increasing opportunities for the Council to interact with the commissions on regional developments.

Internal reform of the regional commissions was an important component of the general process of reform of the United Nations system; she noted with pleasure that the Secretary-General's report concentrated mainly on issues of coordination including the distribution of tasks between Headquarters and the regional and national levels, based on the most appropriate division of labour.

There was an urgent need for greater coordination at the regional level and for closer cooperation between the regional commissions, the global bodies of the United Nations system, and other relevant regional bodies, in order to avoid overlapping and duplication, and she therefore supported the participation of the executive secretaries in meetings of the Executive Committee for Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Group as well as the active participation of the regional commissions in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) process.

It was important for the team leadership role of the regional commissions to be recognized in order to minimize duplication, and she therefore welcomed the Secretary-General's proposal to schedule coordination meetings, to be chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, between the regional commissions and the United Nations funds and programmes engaged in regional activities. For

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budgetary reasons she welcomed the fact that the United Nations bodies were to be represented by their regional heads.

The Group of 77 and China supported the dual roles of the regional commissions as outposts of the United Nations carrying out programmes and activities in support of the United Nations global mission and as the regional expressions of the United Nations integrated in the institutional landscape of their respective geographic areas. With regard to the former role, their critical mass, interdisciplinarity and multisectoral capacities made the regional commissions important tools for follow-up to global conferences; with regard to the latter role, it was important for there to be cooperation between the commissions and all, not only economic, regional bodies.

The Group of 77 and China were particularly interested in fostering South-South cooperation through subregional groupings, many of which had been created either directly by the regional commissions or with their close cooperation and support, and which continued to rely on the regional commissions for support.

The major function of the regional commissions must be the promotion of regional cooperation and integration. Because of their interdisciplinarity and multisectoral approach, the regional commissions were involved with normative tasks as well as operational activities; both were of the utmost importance and must be mutually supportive. It was indispensable for the regional commissions to continue to perform both roles.

Mr. SUCHARIPA (Austria), speaking on behalf of the European Union, and the associate countries of Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and, in addition, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, endorsed the view of the Secretary-General that the regional commissions could play an important role as agents for facilitating regional cooperation in a wide range of economic, social and related activities and as an interface between the national and the global levels. He agreed that the regional commissions should contribute to improving the Organization's overall relevance and effectiveness and that their role must therefore be seen in the broader context of United Nations reform to promote a more focused division of labour between Headquarters and the regional and the national levels based on comparative advantage. Since the commissions were funded from the regular budget, they also bore a responsibility to the entire United Nations membership.

Each regional commission was distinct, with a specific regional mandate and work programme, but all fulfilled valuable functions with regard to norm-setting, statistics and analytical work, and provided technical assistance in support of those functions. They were well placed to facilitate the promotion and implementation of global commitments within the United Nations framework, to enable Member States to present their points of views and to provide a valuable forum for discussion where all Member States met on an equal footing.

He welcomed the efforts undertaken by each commission to reform, set priorities and streamline intergovernmental machinery, and encouraged them to pursue those efforts, in particular in monitoring and evaluating programmes as well as in adapting their secretariats to the new and streamlined substantive strategies. In that context, he supported the Secretary-General's call for cooperation among the regional commissions so as to share best practices and concrete achievements.

He noted the good progress made in implementing reforms by the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), which had well defined its niche in a complex institutional environment and played a very valuable role in the development of common legal instruments, norms and standards; it was also a recognized authority in the areas of statistics and economic analysis for the region. He encouraged it to continue the prioritization of work within its principal subsidiary bodies in order to encourage more flexibility and dynamism in programming and stressed the role of the secretariat in the reform progress; the innovative format of the previous session of the ECE with its interactive debates had also proven very successful.

Within the broader context of United Nations reform, he agreed that the Secretariat's responsibilities must be better defined and said that the Executive Committee for Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Group should serve as the main vehicles for bringing the activities of the regional commissions more closely into the overall activities of the United Nations; he therefore welcomed the commitment of the Secretary-General to ensure the active participation of the regional commissions in those mechanisms.

He also welcomed the efforts made by the Secretary-General to address shortcomings in regional coordination and hoped that proposals such as the convening of yearly regional meetings would be determined by the needs of each region, build on already existing coordination mechanisms and focus on issues

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where regional coordination was required. He looked forward to receiving more information from the Secretariat concerning the involvement of the regional commissions in the UNDAF process.

He wished to encourage greater exchange of information among all entities operating at the regional level, including non-United Nations bodies, as contributing to a better division of labour. In that context, he supported the Secretary-General's call for close cooperation between regional commissions and other, non-United Nations regional or subregional bodies in order to achieve optimal use of resources. He also looked forward to better interaction at the intergovernmental level. More information should be available in New York on the work of the regional commissions and there should be more frequent briefings by the executive secretaries. Finally, he stressed the importance of the regional commissions within the United Nations system and of cooperation between Member States at the regional level.

Mr. PAL (India) associated his delegation with the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and expressed his satisfaction at the enhanced coordination between the Council and the regional commissions.

His delegation had always supported the reform and restructuring process, particularly in the regional commissions, as a necessary part of the continuing effort to render the system more efficient and effective. The regional commissions had been implementing internal reforms for a considerable period of time and his delegation was satisfied with the reforms undertaken at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and hoped that those measures, once fully implemented, would streamline its work in the areas of regional economic cooperation and poverty alleviation.

The regional commissions, particularly ESCAP, had catalysed economic development in their member States and promoted enhanced regional economic cooperation. In so doing, they had identified their core competencies, and that should be taken into account when discussing the need to more clearly define and distribute tasks within the United Nations system and to identify and focus on the comparative advantage of each component. The Council had acknowledged that the regional commissions must have sufficient authority and resources to carry out their activities.

The regional commissions' operational activities needed to be strengthened,

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and his delegation supported the Secretary-General's recommendations concerning the forging of strategic alliances between regional commissions and other United Nations bodies and the allocation of resources, including regular budget resources, to operational activities rather than to meetings and publications. The latter should not, however, occur at the expense of meetings and publications undertaken in pursuit of ESCAP's mandate to carry out research and studies such as regional economic surveys and feasibility studies in the field of regional cooperation in infrastructure. The regional commissions were also well placed to build on the work of subregional organizations; ESCAP had undertaken commendable initiatives in that regard and was providing substantive support to subregional organizations through work undertaken at their request.

The regional commissions shared a common mandate to raise the level of economic development and cooperation in their regions and to serve as a forum for articulating regional perspectives on global issues, and vice versa, and were ideally placed to facilitate the exchange of experience and to implement global mandates emanating from recent conferences, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. They therefore had a natural comparative advantage as regional team leaders/coordinators which the Council needed to capitalize on.

He supported the Secretary-General's proposals to encourage horizontal cooperation among the regional commissions and to enhance coordination at the regional level through regular regional inter-agency meetings. The Secretary-General's report had also highlighted the importance of cooperation between the regional commissions and the United Nations funds and programmes in order to improve the effectiveness of the United Nations system as a whole in the areas of technical assistance and operational activities. While sharing that objective and supporting the recommendations for enhanced participation of the regional commissions in the United Nations Development Group, close consultations between UNDP and the regional commissions in programming and other activities, and proposals to improve coordination of the regional commissions and the funds and programmes at the regional level, he said that it would be useful if that cooperation also took into account realities in the field. Since UNDAF and the country strategy note (CSN) were country-driven instruments, the role to be played by the regional commissions was unclear. His delegation nevertheless reiterated its continued commitment to the regional commissions and in particular to ESCAP's policies and its efforts to streamline its work and

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serve as a catalyst for growth and development, and supported proposals for enhanced coordination between the Economic and Social Council and the regional commissions through the regular exchange of information and meetings.

Mr. STEVCEVSKI (Observer for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the work of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) was of particular importance to countries with economies in transition and should be guided by the interest of those countries in becoming integrated into the European Union (EU). The report of the Secretary-General (E/1998/65/Add.1) failed to clearly spell out the future priorities of ECE, which, in his delegation's view, should include access to the EU market for countries with economies in transition, membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) for all ECE members, promotion of direct investment in countries with economies in transition, and promotion of an open-border policy for goods, services and people. In that regard, the work of subregional groupings, including the Central European Initiative (CEI), the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Council (BSEC) and the Inter-State Economic Committee of the Economic Union of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), was of crucial importance for promoting regional economic cooperation and the integration of countries with economies in transition into the common European market.

He hoped that ECE would respond favourably to the General Assembly's call for the relevant international organizations and competent bodies and organizations of the United Nations system to continue to support and assist the ongoing process of development of good-neighbourly relations among the Balkan States.

Mr. CHIRILA (Romania) said that his delegation shared the view that regional commissions, which were the regional outposts of the United Nations, played a valuable role in facilitating cooperation. However, the fact that they were part of the institutional landscape of their respective geographical areas required that they should cooperate closely with other regional bodies in order to reinforce synergies and lessen duplication. In addition, their mandates should be driven by regional needs and by the priorities set by member States.

Romania noted with satisfaction the streamlining of the substantive programme and method of work of the Economic Commission for Europe, the refocusing of its activities on selected priority areas and the restructuring of its intergovernmental machinery. Those reforms reflected the Commission's

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commitment to, inter alia, adapt to the new realities of Europe, better respond to specific needs and challenges and build upon its proven advantages. His Government welcomed, in particular, the Commission's assistance to countries with economies in transition which were attempting to establish a market-based regulatory framework.

Mr. Dae Won SUH (Republic of Korea) said that the regional commissions were a valuable component of the United Nations system and brought a regional perspective to global issues. As the only region-wide intergovernmental policy forum, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) played an important role in promoting economic and social development in the Asia-Pacific region and had streamlined its working methods in order to more effectively meet the new challenges of the twenty-first century. Reform of the commissions was an ongoing process, however, and should complement the reform efforts of the Organization as a whole.

The changing regional situation had brought to the forefront the issue of coordination aimed at avoiding overlap between the activities of ESCAP and those of other regional and subregional organizations. In carrying out their own regional activities, other United Nations bodies should respect the particular role and mandate of ESCAP as team leader of the efforts to coordinate regional economic and social activities. For its part, ESCAP should focus on those programme areas in which it could best utilize its core competencies and strengthen the regional inter-agency consultative mechanism and should serve as a forum for policy dialogues and research aimed at developing new strategies for improved regional cooperation to cope with the financial crisis currently affecting the Asia-Pacific region. His delegation attached particular importance to the Regional Inter-agency Committee for Asia and the Pacific (RICAP).

It was crucial, however, to link the economic and social activities of the regional commissions with those of the United Nations system as a whole and, in that connection, his delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's proposal for yearly regional meetings of the respective regional commissions and other United Nations entities engaged in regional activities. It hoped, however, that the implementation of that proposal would not create another administrative layer.

Lastly, the Council should continue to coordinate the implementation at the regional level of the outcomes of the major global conferences and encourage

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interaction among regional commissions through the sharing of experience and information and through joint programmes. Indeed, cooperation between regional commissions could be an important vehicle for South-South cooperation.

Ms. LINDE (United States of America) commended the Council for the seriousness with which it was taking its role of overseeing the regional commissions and encouraged it to lead the commissions towards continued reform. Her Government was especially pleased with the reforms which had been implemented thus far by ECE and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). ESCAP had initiated its reform process and, while the United States was not a member of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), that commission also appeared to be making serious management changes. The United States was pleased with the innovation shown by the secretariats of the regional commissions in striving for positive change and encouraged each of them to look to the others for further examples of creative and innovative thinking.

Reform was a process of continuous re-examination and improvement and of striving for optimal outputs. The world had changed in the more than fifty years of operations by the commissions and the needs of the regions served had also changed. The commissions' mandate, namely, economic development, must therefore be continually reassessed to ensure that the output delivered met current needs. Efficiency and effectiveness must also be enhanced by reducing administrative costs through the prioritization of work programmes. The commissions must also look for further opportunities for cost-sharing and for increasing extra-budgetary resources.

Her Government was also concerned about the quality of the commissions, work programmes, which should be understood by and make a real contribution to member States. The commissions should set objectives and evaluate their performance in clear and measurable ways in order to ensure that they were producing value-added work. They also needed to fortify their links with civil society, the Bretton Woods institutions and their sister commissions as well as to examine the link between the regional economic commissions and the functional commissions. Each commission must recognize that its role and areas of comparative competence were evolutionary. The Council for its part should develop a harmonized reporting format for the five regional commissions so that members could make comparisons across bodies on each issue. The previous year's narratives had been too dense to follow.

Ms. CUI Ying (China) said that, as a lead agency of the United Nations in the Asia-Pacific region, ESCAP had played a major role in promoting regional cooperation. Extensive discussions had been held at the Commission's fifty-fourth session on such issues as regional economic development, cooperation and reform in the field of social development.

Drawing upon its experience in the economic and social fields, the United Nations system should pursue cooperation activities and introduce mechanisms in the area of financial risk prevention, effective financial monitoring and early warning. Social development cooperation should be results-based and should focus on the alleviation of poverty and unemployment. For their part, developed countries should fulfil their official development assistance (ODA) commitments and provide ESCAP and other United Nations agencies with adequate funding for the development of their member States.

China endorsed the plan to continue the process of reform of ESCAP within the framework adopted at the Commission's previous annual session and concurred with the proposals which had been made by the Executive Secretary of the Commission to further strengthen project monitoring and evaluation and to channel more resources to substantive technical assistance activities.

Mr. KABIR (Bangladesh) welcomed the arrangements which had been made by the Secretary-General for the effective participation by regional commissions in the meetings of the Executive Committee for Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Group. The proposal for joint programmes between the regional commissions on the one hand and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the Department of Social and Economic Affairs on the other was also an interesting one. Those efforts would not only result in more effective coordination but would also introduce a new dimension into the formulation of a global development strategy.

The convening by the Deputy Secretary-General of yearly meetings between the regional commissions and all United Nations funds and programmes, agencies and departments engaged in regional and intercountry activities would enhance coordination between those bodies and further highlight regional needs and concerns. In order to make the process meaningful and effective, resources should be decentralized from Headquarters to the regional commissions so that programmes and actions could be implemented in accordance with the needs of the regions.

Bangladesh noted with satisfaction the continuing efforts of ESCAP to, inter alia, review its conference and programming structure, improve project monitoring, and redeploy resources to more productive areas of activity; in addition serious consideration should be given to institutionalizing the Commission's lead role for coordinating the activities of all United Nations agencies through RICAP. His Government also supported the proposal to extend the authority of ESCAP over other regional and subregional bodies.

The Commission played a useful role in strengthening the consultative mechanism and in providing advisory services to various subregional and interregional organizations and economic cooperation structures and he welcomed the practical measures which had been suggested by the Secretary-General to provide further impetus to the ongoing creative cooperation between the various regional commissions and other intergovernmental development partners. Lastly, Bangladesh supported the Commission's positive role as a forum for articulating the regional perspective on global issues and as a vehicle for regional consensus on development priorities.

Mr. ISAKOV (Russian Federation) said that the regional commissions should assist in adapting United Nations activities to changing needs and priorities in economic and social development and to regional and subregional integration processes. In so doing, they must strengthen their cooperation on cross-sectoral issues with other United Nations system organizations operating in their regions; however, areas of competence should be more clearly allocated in order to move away from competition towards joint efforts and common responsibilities.

The regional commissions played an important role in assisting governments in developing economic and social policies and priorities, the more so when Funds and Programmes could not provide enough technical assistance or where regional commission expertise was more effective. The limited range of technical assistance within commissions' programme activities should therefore be increased.

The role of the regional commissions in coordinating the regional projects of United Nations system organizations should be strengthened. Also, cooperation between the regional commissions and non-United-Nations global and regional organizations should be developed, with due regard to mandates and to the principle of complementarity.

He welcomed the reforms so far carried out by the regional commissions, but monitoring and evaluation of project effectiveness needed to be improved, administrative costs must be cut further, new extra-budgetary sources of funding should be sought and resources should be reallocated from conference services and document production to technical assistance.

Reform should not be carried out for its own sake alone. Rather, the criterion for success should be improved output for Member States: what work the regional commissions did should basically be determined by the countries in their regions. Also, in the reform process, the resource base for the commissions should be maintained and output kept up. In that connection, he made the following suggestions.

The regional commissions should meet with representatives of regional and subregional organizations and programmes to look for ways to strengthen collaboration on the basis of the existing division of labour.

The regional commissions should become more involved in United Nations socio-economic efforts, including post-conflict peace-building, that were part of the system-wide effort to prevent and resolve humanitarian crises.

Interregional cooperation on global issues should be broadened. In that connection, not only should the executive secretaries of the commissions meet, there should be mechanisms to involve interested States.

The regional commissions should seek out ways to involve private sector resources and the business community in their programme activities by methods such as establishing special funds and setting up business councils.

The regional commissions should boost participation by non-governmental organizations in some areas of their activities because such organizations were an irreplaceable means of covering all actors in the development process.

Mr. SKRYBANT (Poland) said that the Secretary-General's report adequately described the scope of ECE activities. Increased funding was necessary as more needed to be done to mitigate the effects of globalization and economic and social reforms in the region. Although growing private sector contributions had somewhat alleviated the situation, there was a danger of ECE's work being held ransom to industrial lobbies that did not represent the interests of all member States. It should be remembered that the integration of the transition economies into the world economy continued to be ECE's final objective. Furthermore, the Bretton Woods institutions should have greater

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access to the work carried out in Europe under sponsorship of the United Nations.

The regional coordination of activities needed to be improved, especially as the importance of the UNDP resident coordinator system, which Poland supported, continued to increase and UNDAF pilot projects involved coordination between various agencies. Governments were responsible for resolving that issue and the Economic and Social Council offered an adequate framework for discussion. In that connection the Secretary-General's initiative to organize annual meetings of heads of funds and programmes should be supported.

Lastly, ECE seminars, round tables and other forms of exchanging information were extremely useful.

Mr. VIENRAVE (Observer for Thailand) associated his delegation with the statement made by Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. He welcomed the on-going reform efforts at ESCAP and the action-oriented results of ESCAP's fifty-fourth session. Some measures of special interest included strengthening ESCAP's regular monitoring and impact assessment capabilities, prompt implementation of the recommendations of the Office of Internal Oversight Services and further reduction of programme support resources so that extra resources could be channelled to technical assistance activities.

His delegation supported ESCAP activities designed to enhance effective cooperation between regional, subregional, intra- and inter-regional organizations. Likewise, it reaffirmed its support for ESCAP's internal reform and its promotion of economic and social development in the region. Moreover, it encouraged implementation of the Secretary-General's recommendations on the need for coordination between the Economic and Social Council, the regional commissions and the different funds and programmes to ensure that the best use was made of limited resources to the benefit of Member States.

Mr. STEPANEK (Czech Republic) said that ten years earlier the Economic Commission for Europe had been the only body bridging two totally different economic systems in Europe; it had provided a unique forum for contacts and for preventing the build-up of incompatibilities. Despite the magnitude of the new global challenges, ECE had been able to adapt to the new circumstances in Europe and had been effective in offsetting the lack of local capacities through its active regionalism. The Commission was currently helping the transition economies to integrate into the European economy, and was also well equipped to

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aid their integration into the global economy.

He supported the Secretary-General's intention to strengthen cooperation among the different regional commissions in order to enhance the performance of the United Nations at the global level. Although differences existed among the countries in each region, there were common issues. The solutions devised by each commission were therefore valid on a wider level and collaboration could prevent the repetition of mistakes and save resources. Cooperation between the regional commissions and the agencies of the United Nations system that operated on a global level was also desirable to ensure that activities had their maximum impact. Member States were responsible for the distribution of tasks among the different United Nations bodies and had an obligation to be consistent in what they required from each one. The agencies could not work in harmony if they were given contradictory tasks and, in that respect, the final documents of the nine global conferences and summits had established a platform for coordination and integration.

At the regional level, cooperation between United Nations and non-United Nations entities required coordination. The Economic and Social Council was well placed to involve the different actors in dialogue. ECE had already carried out successful activities at the regional level, in line with the United Nations reform process. Decentralization was an important element of the reform process and ECE had made considerable efforts to decentralize its activities; however, such efforts had not been accompanied by the transfer of increased authority from United Nations Headquarters in New York to the ECE secretariat in Geneva.

Mr. MIRAFZAL (Observer for the Islamic Republic of Iran) said that all the regional commissions had improved their operations by focusing on activities where they had a comparative advantage and by increasing collaboration with other regional bodies. Certain activities articulated regional perspectives on global issues and should be enhanced. Moreover, further cooperation was needed between the regional commissions and other competent regional bodies, in particular regional economic arrangements. Likewise, there was a need for collaboration on operational activities with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Great progress had been made in the reform of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific by the development of an inter sectoral,

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multi-disciplinary strategy to meet the evolving needs of the region. Operations had been streamlined and resources had been directed more towards operational activities.

The Regional Inter-agency Committee for Asia and the Pacific (RICAP) was actively promoting joint projects with the support of ESCAP. Such collaboration was imperative in order to limit the scope of the recent crisis in south-east Asia. ESCAP's endeavours to raise awareness of the results of recent major United Nations conferences should be commended as should its endeavours to promote land transport in the region.

Mr. CABACTULAN (Observer for the Philippines) said that reform of the regional commissions should continue but that difficult questions needed to be addressed, such as how best to structure the regional commissions to further promote economic and social development, whether the services and products of the regional commissions met current needs, and whether too much was expected of the commissions in view of their limited resources.

His delegation approved ESCAP's various programmes, especially those related to subregional and inter-regional groups. ESCAP was in the forefront of efforts to help the region extricate itself from the recent economic crisis.

The briefings by the executive secretaries of the different United Nations agencies had been very enlightening. However, it appeared that there were limits to what the agencies could do and the question of resources was fundamental. It was satisfying to know that certain countries were increasing their overseas development assistance (ODA). Overall ODA had been in decline for the last five years and he hoped that the international community would soon show the necessary political will to find the required resources. Likewise, with regard to the synchronization of planning and priorities, the different agencies had different planning cycles, and that affected coordination possibilities.

Lastly, the regional commissions should be included as regular participants in the UNDAF process and it would be useful for the Secretary-General, represented by the Deputy Secretary-General, to be actively involved in the regional coordination meetings between the regional commissions and United Nations funds and programmes.

Mr. AL-HASSAN (Oman) associated his delegation with the statement by the Observer for Indonesia speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

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He supported the recommendations in the Secretary-General's report (E/1998/65 and Add.1-3) on the process of reform in the regional commissions: the reforms should strengthen the role of the regional commissions and improve operational output for their member States. However, reforms should not be seen as an end in themselves, nor should they be time-bound: they were part of an ongoing process as the Organization developed and the needs of Member States changed. However, reforms must not so burden the regional commissions that they gave less than the best service to their member States, not least because the regional commissions had comparative advantages: they had their own regional perspectives and could put those regional perspectives, and recommendations, across in a multilateral context.

Oman's general support for the reform measures extended to the particular measures recommended for the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, on the understanding that its vital role in the region should not be jeopardized.

ESCWA played a vital and very practical role in supporting enhanced cooperation and coordination of activities with and among regional and subregional bodies, including the League of Arab States and the Gulf Cooperation Council, and wished to see permanent mechanisms established to that end.

At the operational level, there was a need to improve communication and coordination between ESCWA and other bodies of the United Nations, in order to ensure the maximum benefit for the region. Coordination of the activities of the regional commissions with the activities undertaken by the organization at the regional level, together with yearly meetings between each commission and United Nations funds, programmes and agencies, would greatly facilitate that process.

The close cooperation that had been established between ESCWA and ECE, with frequent exchanges of views, experience and information, particularly with regard to transport issues, was an example of how regional commissions could fruitfully work together to strengthen their capacities. ESCWA should prepare programmes for the exchange of electronic information in the fields of administration, trade and transport.

Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 50/120, the regional commissions should play a fundamental role in the triennial policy reviews, and in ensuring the success of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) at the regional level.

Draft proposals recommended by the regional commissions (E/1998/65/Add.2)

The PRESIDENT invited the Council to take action on the draft proposals recommended to it by the regional commissions and contained in chapter I of document E/1998/65/Add.2.

Draft resolution contained in chapter I, section A

The draft resolution was adopted.

Draft resolution contained in chapter I, section B

The draft resolution was adopted.

Mr. KITAZAWA (Japan) noted that the resolution just adopted, entitled "Strengthening regional support for persons with disabilities into the twenty-first century", had had 14 co-sponsors when his delegation submitted it to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific at its fifty-fourth session.

The first half of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons had brought about a dramatic change in awareness of disability issues: charitable activities for "unfortunates" had given way to promoting active participation in and contribution to society by the disabled as full members of society and as valuable human resources. However, much remained to be done and support for national efforts to mainstream disabled persons must be strengthened, and he therefore welcomed the Council's adoption of the draft resolution by consensus.

Draft decision contained in chapter I, section C

The draft decision was adopted.

Draft resolutions I and II contained in chapter I, section D

Draft resolutions I and II were adopted.

Mr. GLANZER (Observer for Austria), speaking on behalf of the European Union, welcomed all efforts to improve cooperation and coordination between the United Nations bodies engaged in regional activities and emphasized that the resolutions and decision just adopted should be seen in the larger context of the outcome of the review of regional commissions. The European Union hoped that the Council would adopt the outcome of that review under the agenda item entitled "Implementation of General Assembly resolutions 50/227 and 52/12 B" while ensuring that recommendations addressed to the United Nations system were compatible with the system's field-level coordination mechanisms such as the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and the resident coordinator system.

He stressed that the resolutions and decision just adopted contained recommendations responding to specific regional concerns and circumstances and that their adoption by the Council should not imply any precedent for other regional commissions.

Ms. SINGGIH (Observer for Indonesia) speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Group of 77 and China supported the regional commissions' reform efforts in respect of improved coordination with United Nations and non-United-Nations organizations, and in the other areas of concern to individual regional commissions reflected in document E/1998/65/Add.2. The document had successfully taken into account the differing interests and needs of each region.

The PRESIDENT drew the attention of the Council to document E/1998/65/Add.3, which had been prepared pursuant to a request by the Chairman of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

He took it that the Council wished to take note of the reports submitted under the agenda item under discussion (E/1998/4-15 and E/1998/65 and Add.1-3).

It was so decided.

Mr. AMOAKO (Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa), speaking as current coordinator of the regional commissions, said that the regional commissions appreciated their improved access to the Council over the past year because it had made possible discussion of a number of issues, had improved the council's appreciation of the work of the regional commissions and had enabled the commissions to receive the Council's guidance and support.

The regional commissions accepted that reform was not an event but a process, and were committed to continuing reforms to improve efficiency and relevance in the context of the Secretary-General's programme of reforms; in conducting those reforms in the direction of rationalization, coherence and effectiveness, feedback from the Council was both desirable and welcome. The proposed schedule of executive-level meetings should help ensure synergy and cohesion and avoid overlap between the Council, the funds and programmes and the regional commissions.

The regional commissions would work out how to implement the team leadership role of the regional coordinators within their own regional contexts, on the understanding that the role was both useful and necessary.

The PRESIDENT said that it was important for the Council to acquire a

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feel for the work of the regional commissions in the field, with which Council members did not come into direct contact when working at Headquarters. In that connection, he had discussed with the coordinator of the regional commissions the possibility of a more formal linkage between the regional commissions and delegations at sessions of the Council.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.