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### Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Technical Committee  
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UN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION  
FOR WESTERN ASIA

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Item 6 (d) of the provisional agenda LIBRARY + DOCUMENT SECTION

### REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION

### SUMMARIES OF REPORTS OF SESSIONS OF THE COMMISSION'S SUBSIDIARY BODIES

#### Report on the third session of the Committee on Water Resources

## I. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

### A. Venue, date and objectives of the session

1. The third session of the Committee on Water Resources was held in Beirut at the permanent headquarters of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) on 21 and 22 April 1999.

### B. Participants

2. Representatives of the following ESCWA member States participated in the third session of the Committee on Water Resources of ESCWA: Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. In addition, the session was attended by experts specialized in water resources from various regional organizations.

## II. DISCUSSION

### A. Progress made in the implementation of the programme of work for the biennium 1998-1999 and achievements of the Energy, Natural Resources and Environment Division in the field of water resources during 1998 (Agenda item 5)

3. Under agenda item 5, the Committee discussed document E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/10.
4. The Committee made the following observations:

(a) The members of the Committee suggested to the ESCWA secretariat that the document should contain more detailed information on the activities carried out in the field of water resources during 1998. The ESCWA representative replied that the document was concise because the 1998-1999 work programme had been presented at the first session of the Committee;

(b) One of the representatives of the member States requested ESCWA to submit a periodic report on follow-up to regional and international conferences on water resources in the ESCWA region and to urge the coordinators of such conferences to invite representatives of the ESCWA member States to attend. The representative of ESCWA replied that ESCWA could provide the Committee at its next session with a concise report on such conferences, but that urging their organizers to invite the States might not be possible.

B. The Commission's view of the future of the field of water resources  
(Agenda item 6)

5. The members of the Committee reviewed document E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/6 concerning a view of the future of water in the ESCWA region.

6. The members of the Committee made a number of observations concerning the amendment of certain expressions contained in the document (see annex I).

C. Proposals concerning the formation of specialized working groups  
on various water-related subjects  
(Agenda item 7)

7. The Committee discussed the proposal contained in document E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/3 on the formation of specialized working groups on various water-related subjects and the representatives of the States discussed the content and purpose of the proposal and the possible related mechanism of operation. The ESCWA representative informed the members of the Committee that the proposal had been submitted to the Committee on Water Resources for the purpose of ascertaining the members' views regarding the determination of priorities upon the creation of those groups and finding appropriate mechanisms for its work. Finally, he requested ESCWA to carry out an exhaustive study of the priorities with which those groups might concern themselves and their mechanism of operation.

D. Advisory services of ESCWA in the field of water resources development  
(Agenda item 8)

8. The ESCWA regional adviser on water resources presented document E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/4 on advisory activities and services offered by ESCWA to the member States.

9. The members of the Committee discussed the document and commended the services provided by ESCWA, stressing their importance in the solving of current national problems and requesting that such services should continue.

10. The participants also called for making use of the advisory services offered by ESCWA and also of the studies carried out with the German expertise available in the Natural Resources Section of the Energy, Natural Resources and Environment Division.

11. The members of the Committee stated their desire to receive communications directly in addition to receiving them via the customary official channels at ESCWA.

E. Presentation and discussion of a declaration of the Committee on  
Water Resources on the water situation in the ESCWA  
(Agenda item 9)

12. Under agenda item 9, the Committee discussed document E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/7.
13. The members of the Committee approved the declaration of the Committee on Water Resources on the water situation in the ESCWA region in the annexed final version (see annex II).

F. Activities related to the celebration of World Water Day, having as its theme  
for 1999 "Everybody lives downstream", with emphasis on water  
resource management at the source and the river basin level  
(Agenda item 10)

14. In compliance with a proposal made by the Committee on Water Resources at its second session, the representative of Lebanon and the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic each presented a technical paper, the first of which (E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/9) presented, in connection with the theme of World Water Day, a preliminary estimated balance-sheet for a number of Lebanese catchment areas. The second paper (E/ESCWA/ENR/1999/IG.1/11) discussed the water situation in the Syrian Arab Republic from the standpoint of available surface and ground water and the related demand and projects proposed for the development and protection of water resources, within the framework of strategic water plans. There ensued a scientific discussion of the papers with the members of the Committee.

G. Other matters

15. The members of the Committee on Water Resources discussed the possibility of holding the sessions of the Committee once every two years as originally provided in the resolution concerning the establishment of the Committee, particularly in view of the fact that the ESCWA secretariat found it difficult to convene the second session of the Committee, with the result that it had to be postponed from April 1998 to December 1998. However, as a number of members of the Committee expressed reservations concerning the holding of sessions every two years, it was decided that the existing arrangement regarding the periodicity of sessions should be maintained.
16. The members of the Committee discussed the work being done through German technical assistance in the field of water resources development and management.

**III. RECOMMENDATIONS**

17. The participants adopted the following recommendations:
- (a) Concerning the review of ESCWA activities in the field of water resources
- (i) ESCWA should continue to provide technical advice to the member States in the field of water resources;
  - (ii) The regional adviser on water resources should undertake a study to determine areas of common interest among the countries of the region, basing it on earlier studies dealing with water conditions in the ESCWA member States.

(b) Concerning the Commission's view of the future of the field of water resources

This view of the future of the field of water resources should be the basis on which ESCWA builds its future programmes, taking into account the observations of the members of the Committee.

(c) Concerning a proposal regarding the formation of specialized working groups on various water-related subjects

ESCWA should prepare a report containing the requisite details concerning the priorities of the various water-related topics, and propose the working groups required in order to study the question and define machineries for carrying out the work of the groups at the next session.

(d) Concerning the declaration of the Committee on Water Resources on the water situation in the ESCWA region

The Committee on Water Resources adopted the proposed declaration entitled "Declaration of the Committee on Water Resources on the water situation in the ESCWA region", to be issued on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

(e) Concerning the activities related to the celebration of World Water Day

In connection with the theme of the 1999 celebration, "Everybody lives downstream", with emphasis on water resource management at the source and the river basin level, ESCWA should contribute, if possible, by providing downstream countries situated on shared international watercourses with climatic and hydrologic data and information related to the operations of upstream States to assist downstream States in preparing their operating plans accordingly.

(f) Other matters

- (i) ESCWA should request the Government of Germany to continue to provide ESCWA with technical assistance in the field of water resources in order to complete existing projects and proceed with the implementation of additional projects, especially in the field of shared ground water;
- (ii) The concerned quarters in ESCWA should provide the members of the Committee on Water Resources with all correspondence pertaining to ESCWA activities in the water sector directly, in addition to providing it via the customary official channels;
- (iii) The programmes of international and regional conferences on subjects related to water resources should be followed, and summaries regarding them should be submitted to the Committee on Water Resources to facilitate the achievement of the Committee's objectives in the area of follow-up to international and regional conferences;
- (iv) Specialized training courses on various water-related issues should be held for the member States, provided that funds are available.

18. The members of the Committee agreed to hold the fourth session of the Committee on Water Resources at ESCWA headquarters in Beirut on 18 and 19 April 2000.

Annex I

**THE COMMISSION'S VIEW OF THE FUTURE OF THE FIELD  
OF WATER RESOURCES<sup>1</sup>**

1. In view of the water conditions prevailing in the region and the desire of the member States to put an end to wars, establish peace and prepare for the third millennium, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) can play an effective role in helping the member States to ensure sound development, rational management and exploitation of available water resources and creating promising new water resources that will satisfy the growing demand for water and reduce the water shortage in the ESCWA region so as to bring economic and social development through close regional cooperation within the ESCWA countries.
2. During this year—as is fitting for the celebration, in May, of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Commission—the water sector has seen an abundance of studies and meetings and the adoption of numerous proposals as a result of the concern of the ESCWA secretariat with this vital field, a concern that is based fundamentally on social and economic development.
3. The Committee on Water Resources,
  - (a) Recalling the efforts made by ESCWA over the past 25 years, in particular the statements issued by the Commission, and repeated on a number of occasions, concerning the extreme importance of water as a resource, its protection from pollution and rationalization of its consumption and its management so as to ensure the perpetuation of this resource, in terms of both quality and quantity, in the countries of the region;
  - (b) Taking note of the developments required in order to promote regional and international cooperation, the pooling of efforts and the gathering of the requisite resources for the development of this vital sector in the ESCWA region, known for its dearth of water resources and the fact that it lies in the world's arid and semi-arid geographic regions;
  - (c) Noting, through the expert group meetings held and the studies published by ESCWA, that the available water resources cannot meet needs, which are growing as a result of accelerating social and economic development and an increasing population growth rate, and that the beginning of the first decade of the third millennium will witness an increasing demand on available water resources which it may be difficult to satisfy with traditional water resources;
  - (d) Valuing the provisions of the declaration made in Damascus in 1989 by the Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting on Water Security in the ESCWA Region;
  - (e) In pursuance of the successive and repeated recommendations, issued by the expert group meetings organized by the ESCWA secretariat, on the conservation of water resources through rationalization of their development, administration and consumption;
  - (f) Taking into account the Mar del Plata Action Plan, which was adopted by representatives of States in 1977 at the United Nations Water Conference and relates to all aspects of the various activities calling for conservation, development and rational management of water resources; two ESCWA meetings on water, held respectively in Baghdad in 1976 and Riyadh in 1978-1979; Agenda 21, which was adopted by

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<sup>1</sup> In the agenda of the third session of the Committee on Water Resources this title appears as follows: "A view of the future of water in the ESCWA region". The participants decided to replace that title with the title appearing above.

the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992) and whose chapter 18 calls for "protection of the quality and supply of freshwater resources"; and the follow-up by ESCWA on a number of occasions, through studies and meetings, of the efforts of the member States to implement the said Agenda;

(g) Appreciating the efforts made by the ESCWA member States, whether individually or collectively, to solve the problems arising from participation in the administration, development and use of shared surface or ground water resources, taking into account the efforts exerted by regional and international organizations in the ESCWA region in their respective fields and in accordance with their respective specializations,

4. Requests the ESCWA secretariat to continue its role of assisting States in the field of water resource development, management and conservation, for indeed, water resources constitute a strategic national treasure that requires the utmost attention on the part of decision-makers with a view to its optimum use and integrated rational management, which must be achieved by making available technological means of alleviating the shortage of water in a region that lies geographically within the world's arid and semi-arid zone. The continuation of that role includes the following:

(a) That ESCWA should assist the member State in establishing water policies within national policy frameworks for economic and social development and the environment;

(b) That ESCWA should undertake to create a database, collecting, preparing and publishing data in a methodical way and in forms that serve the strategies of the member States; and that the question of creating an adequate database for assessing water resources should continue to be accorded priority;

(c) That ESCWA should find ways and means of encouraging national legislation and regional agreements and their implementation so as to conserve water resources and reduce their pollution;

(d) That decision-makers should review agricultural policies and the related strategies and institutional arrangements to bring them into line with available water resources for the entire country and in accordance with what is specific to each country, inasmuch as the agricultural sector is the biggest consumer of available water resources;

(e) That ESCWA should play a primary role in the publication of basic technologies for increasing water resources, such as desalination, reuse of waste water, rain harvesting and limitation of water loss;

(f) That ESCWA should play a role in the coordination of the use of uniform standards, methods and measures in the monitoring of water quantity and quality, in the collection of data and in the classification of water according to use, wherever possible;

(g) That ESCWA should carry out exhaustive studies on the economics of water, such as the cost of services and maintenance, investment, privatization, the role of the private sector in the development of water resources and the encouragement of non-governmental organizations to develop, manage and operate water enterprises;

(h) That ESCWA should assume the role of an intermediary in order to encourage cooperation between riparian countries within shared watershed areas for the creation of suitable legal, institutional and executive mechanisms and to promote cooperation in the collection, coordination and exchange of relevant data in the case of shared resources;

(i) That steps should be taken, by agreement among the parties concerned, for the establishment of cooperation in areas such as data collection, standardization of data forms, data exchange, management of shared water resources and efforts to combat water pollution;

(j) That emergency plans ready to be implemented in case of drought, which may affect the region in certain years, should be made public; drought warning systems should be established; and the effects of drought on the various water-bearing strata of the earth should be ascertained.

Annex II

**DECLARATION OF THE COMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES ON  
THE WATER SITUATION IN THE ESCWA REGION**

The Committee on Water Resources:

Recalling, after a lapse of two decades since the United Nations Water Conference (Mar del Plata, 1977) and more than six years since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), the various efforts exerted by international and regional organizations, in particular the outstanding efforts of ESCWA,

Whereas the water situation in the Arab countries of Western Asia at the threshold of the third millennium has become graver and more difficult than at the time of those conferences,

Whereas the quantitative and qualitative decline in both surface and ground water resources in many parts of the region; the population increase in its towns and cities in particular; the resulting growth of water consumption in both households and industry, and especially in agriculture; the concomitant increase in the need for food security and the need to protect future generations, conserving their share of the limited water resources available in the region; and the decline in reserves of shared water resources and in their quality—all of which constitute factors that prompt the members of the Committee on Water Resources, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of ESCWA, to issue a declaration aimed at warding off the danger which is approaching at a rate that exceeds all expectations,

Appeals to the States, communities and individuals of the region to continue and redouble their efforts to take action to meet this challenge, including:

1. Cooperation and integration aimed at developing water resources, protecting them from deterioration, pollution and shortage and rationalizing their use so as to ensure their continued use for present and future life, in consideration of the fact that the interests of the Arab countries of Western Asia in this domain are joint interests and that food and water security for each of their members is part of the security of all;
2. The need for work in the area of integrated management with a view to the development of water resources and the rationalization of their consumption and use, inasmuch as water resources constitute a strategic national treasure that requires the utmost attention on the part of decision-makers with a view to its optimum use, integrated rational management, the availability of technologies to alleviate the shortage of water in an arid or semi-arid region such as ours, and the use of the modern techniques employed in water resources conservation;
3. The need to concentrate efforts on the establishment of water policies within national policy frameworks for economic and social development and protection of the environment and, inasmuch as the agricultural sector is the biggest consumer of available water resources, the need for decision-makers to review agricultural policies in the region;
4. The need to create a database for collecting data in a methodical way and in forms that serve the strategies of the member States, on the one hand, and serve to create plans for dealing with the drought which the region faces, on the other hand, in view of the fact that the quantitative and qualitative evaluation of freshwater resources is an ongoing process;



5. Work and cooperation to solve any problems that exist or arise with regard to shared surface or ground water resources, including their proper management and organization, by means of cooperation among riparian States within a shared watershed area to establish appropriate legal, institutional and executive mechanisms and cooperation in the collection, coordination and exchange of the required data.

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