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Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction

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Implementation of the programme of work of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management

Report on the progress of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management on its programme of work

Note by the secretariat

Summary

In its resolution 71/11, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific decided to establish the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management as a regional institution of the Commission. The present document contains an outline of the progress made in operationalizing the Centre and implementing its programme of work through a multi-pronged approach that includes establishing the Centre, putting in place the Centre's governing structure and programme of work, and organizing capacity-building activities in disaster information management, including on sand and dust storms pursuant to Commission resolution 72/7.

The Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction is invited to provide further guidance on the implementation of the Centre's programme of work as well as on its future focus and activities.

I. Introduction

A. Institutional arrangement

1. In its resolution 71/11, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) decided to establish the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management as a regional institution of the Commission.

2. The Centre will be located in Tehran. In accordance with the statute of the Centre, annexed to resolution 71/11, the activities of the Centre will be in line with relevant policy decisions adopted by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission, and it will contribute to the organizational goals of ESCAP. The Centre will be subject to the financial and staff regulations and rules of the United Nations and the applicable administrative instructions.

* E/ESCAP/CDR(5)/L.1.

B. Mandate

3. In its resolution 71/11, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to take all the necessary measures to ensure that the Centre is established promptly, including the conclusion of a headquarters agreement between the host country and the United Nations.

4. In its resolution 72/7, on regional cooperation to combat sand and dust storms in Asia and the Pacific, the Commission also requested the Executive Secretary to accord priority to sand and dust storms as a great transboundary challenge, and to work, including through the Centre, to promote regional and interregional networking on sand and dust storms. In this regard, disaster-related work on transboundary sand and dust storm issues is being carried out as part of the Centre's programme of work.

5. As a subsidiary body of the Commission, the Centre is aligned with and contributes to the strategic framework and programme of work of ESCAP. The secretariat has taken the necessary steps to establish the Centre in the Islamic Republic of Iran and developed the Centre's workplan for inclusion in the ESCAP programmes of work for the bienniums 2016-2017 and 2018-2019.¹ The objectives and activities of the Centre contribute to subprogramme 5 on information and communications technology and disaster risk reduction and management.

6. The strategic focus of subprogramme 5 is to improve the capabilities of member States to create more disaster-resilient societies. With the establishment of the Centre, these efforts will be further augmented by capacity-building in disaster information management organized by the Centre. The Centre is mandated to work with ESCAP members and associate members and other relevant stakeholders to reduce the risks, damage and losses resulting from disasters through capacity-building and strengthened regional cooperation in disaster information management.

7. The objective of subprogramme 5 for the biennium 2016-2017 includes enhancing the contribution of disaster risk reduction strategies and management to the achievement of inclusive, sustainable and resilient development in Asia and the Pacific. Expected accomplishment (b) is the most relevant to the Centre, regarding improved knowledge and awareness of member States of effective strategies and policies in disaster risk reduction and management, including their gender dimensions, for inclusive, equitable, sustainable and resilient development.

8. Further, the Centre will contribute to the objective of subprogramme 5 for the biennium 2018-2019 by addressing the relevant areas of expected accomplishments (a) (strengthened regional mechanisms to effectively address shared challenges and opportunities in disaster risk reduction and management for resilient and sustainable development), (b) (enhanced evidence-based policies on disaster risk reduction and management for resilient and sustainable development, including gender perspectives) and (c) (strengthened capacity of member States to use disaster risk reduction and management for resilient and sustainable development).

¹ See A/69/6 (Prog. 16) and A/71/6 (Prog. 16).

II. Alignment of the programme of work of the Centre with regional needs with respect to disaster information management

9. Natural disasters continue to threaten sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region. Many of these disasters are transboundary in nature. Asia and the Pacific is the most disaster-prone region in the world, and is also home to two of the most seismically active fault belts, which spread across national boundaries. The impacts of these disasters constitute a serious threat to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to poverty eradication and food security.

10. The forthcoming *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2017* systematically analyses disaster risks and the impacts of natural disasters, as described in the following paragraphs.²

11. Economic impacts from natural disasters have been substantial, causing huge economic losses in the affected countries. Total regional economic damage from natural disasters between 1970 and 2016 reached approximately \$1.3 trillion (in 2005 United States dollars). Floods, storms, droughts and earthquakes, including tsunamis, were responsible for 96.7 per cent of the economic damage in the region.

12. From 2000 to 2016, countries in the South and South-West Asia subregion reported more than 260,000 deaths. Earthquakes were responsible for more than 70 per cent, approximately 187,000 fatalities. Droughts and floods affected 692 million and 428 million people respectively.

13. During the same period, North and Central Asia lost close to 60,000 lives, with more than 13 million people affected and economic damage amounting to \$9.8 billion. Droughts affected close to 8.4 million people and caused economic damage amounting to \$2.1 billion. Earthquakes and floods resulted in severe economic damage, amounting to \$0.9 billion and \$3.9 billion respectively.

14. The impacts of sand and dust storms are widespread across the Asia-Pacific region. The arid and semi-arid plains of Central Asia experience a high frequency of dust storms as well as salt storms. Salt storms arise owing to the salinization rates of the subregion's lakes. Most countries in South and South-West Asia are also exposed to the risk of sand and dust storms, with the exception of the southern part of the Indian peninsula. Local sources of sand and dust storms and hotspots are found in all the subregions in Asia, but many originate in West Asia and North Africa.

15. The 2015-2016 El Niño phenomenon, one of the strongest episodes observed in the last 50 years, triggered severe weather anomalies, ranging from increased frequency of floods and higher intensity of cyclones to prolonged drought.

16. The impacts of disasters on the economy and people are aggravated by extreme weather events triggered by the effects of climate change. More vulnerable people and assets are increasingly being exposed to climate extremes. The increased likelihood of extreme events and weather-related

² Detailed analyses on the impacts of disasters are discussed in *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2017* (United Nations publication, forthcoming).

disaster risks that cut across borders has made regional cooperation among contiguous countries important.

17. The region's second most seismically active zone is the Alpine-Himalayan orogenic belt. Another active fault line threatens Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan.

18. In an increasingly vulnerable region, information and knowledge management are essential for improving disaster risk management. Data and information become valuable in risk identification, assessment and prevention as well as for improving preparedness and response in the event of disaster. Data and information are most critical for accurate evaluation of damage and loss and post-disaster needs assessment, in order to take account of risk reduction measures in the recovery and reconstruction processes and build back better. Similarly, disaster loss databases are important for accounting for damage and losses caused by large-scale and small-scale recurrent disasters.

19. In response to needs with respect to disaster information management, the Centre, in developing its strategic plan, programme direction and programme of work, was guided by global and regional agreements and international frameworks adopted to guide sustainable development over the next two decades, in particular the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and the Paris Agreement.

20. Disaster risk reduction and resilience-building are cross-cutting themes of the 2030 Agenda. Disaster information will be instrumental in achieving the Sustainable Development Goal targets related to disaster risk reduction, specifically under Goals 1 (End poverty in all its forms everywhere), 11 (Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable) and 13 (Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts). Resilience-building is mainstreamed in many sector-related goals. The Centre's information and knowledge management products and services will also be relevant to address the resilience components of relevant Sustainable Development Goals, such as Goals 2 (End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture), 9 (Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation) and 15 (Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss).

21. In the Sendai Framework, the need for agreed regional and subregional cooperation strategies and mechanisms and for progress to be reviewed by regional and global platforms is highlighted. Regional priorities are identified in the Sendai Framework as follows: (a) understanding disaster risk; (b) strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk; (c) investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience; and (d) enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to build back better in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

22. In the Asia Regional Plan for Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, adopted at the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held in New Delhi in 2016, regional collaboration and cooperation are encouraged in order to effectively mitigate disaster risks and contribute to greater resilience in the region. Regional cooperation and related North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation mechanisms are recognized as being crucial.

23. Likewise, in its resolution 71/12, on strengthening regional mechanisms for the implementation of the Sendai Framework in Asia and the Pacific, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to guide action at the regional level to address shared disaster risk. Furthermore, in its resolution 72/7, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to work on regional cooperation to combat sand and dust storms in Asia and the Pacific.

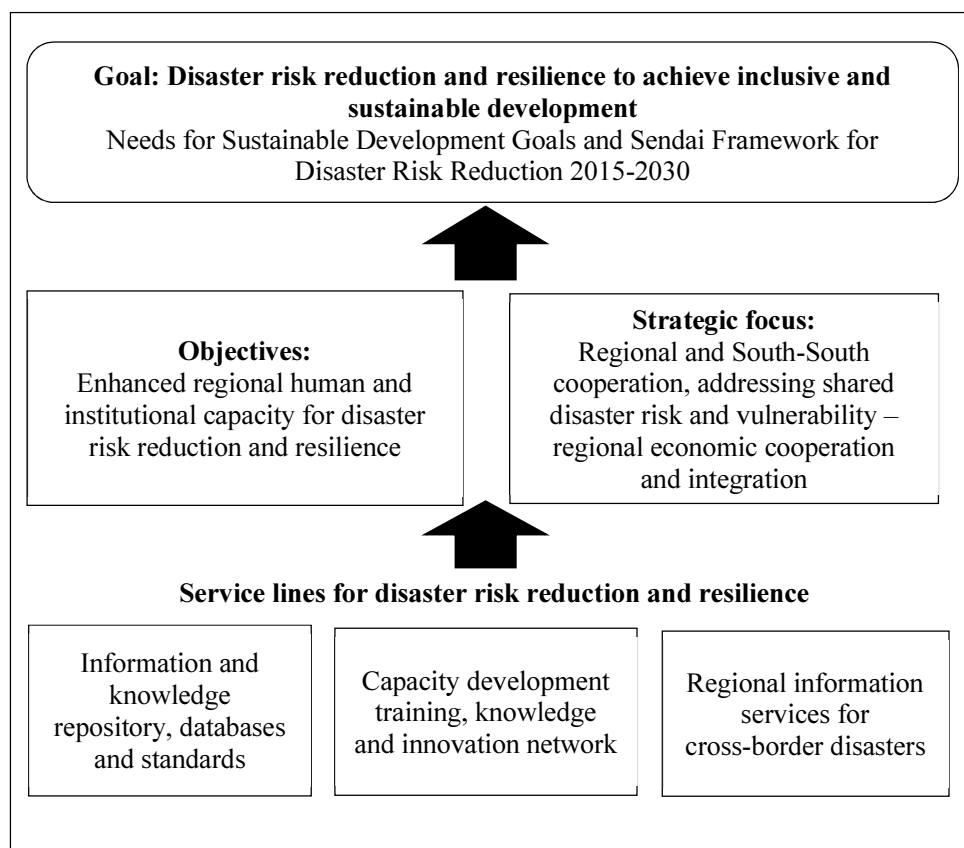
24. In the Tehran Ministerial Declaration, adopted at the International Conference on Combating Sand and Dust Storms held in Tehran from 3 to 5 July 2017, the role of the Centre in developing human and institutional capacity through strengthened regional cooperation in disaster information management was recognized.

25. In its resolution 73/7, on enhancing regional cooperation for the implementation of the Sendai Framework in Asia and the Pacific, the Commission encouraged members and associate members and international organizations to provide support to the Centre and to cooperate for the achievement of its objectives and the implementation of its work programme.

26. As outlined in Commission resolution 71/11, the main objective of the Centre is to reduce the risks, losses and damages resulting from natural hazards by developing the capacities and capabilities of the countries and organizations of the region in disaster information management, supporting disaster risk reduction and strengthening regional cooperation in disaster information management. It is expected that the Centre's programme of work will contribute to the achievement of the above-mentioned Sustainable Development Goals and targets related to disaster risk reduction and the global targets and four priorities for action of the Sendai Framework (figure I).

Figure I

Objectives and service lines of the Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management



III. Progress in implementing the Centre's programme of work

27. The Centre's programme of work has been implemented through a multi-pronged strategic approach that includes concluding the agreements and administrative procedures for the establishment of the Centre in Tehran, establishing the governance and programme of work of the Centre, raising its visibility, and strengthening capacity relating to disaster information management among policymakers and experts of member States in the field of disaster risk reduction.

A. Establishing the Centre

28. A road map for establishing the Centre and its operations has been prepared. The secretariat has been engaged in an intensive process of consultations with the host Government to finalize the host country agreement and the agreement on administrative and financial arrangements for establishing the Centre as a regional institution of ESCAP, pursuant to Commission resolution 71/11. Consultations between the secretariat and the host country Government have also continued with regard to office space and bringing the identified space into compliance with the United Nations minimum operating security standards. This work has been carried out in consultation with the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and with the support of the office of the Resident Coordinator in Tehran.

29. The host country agreement is close to finalization. It is expected that two professional staff and two general service staff will be ready to start operations by the first quarter of 2018 in the Centre's designated building or temporary space rented from the United Nations.

B. Governance and programme

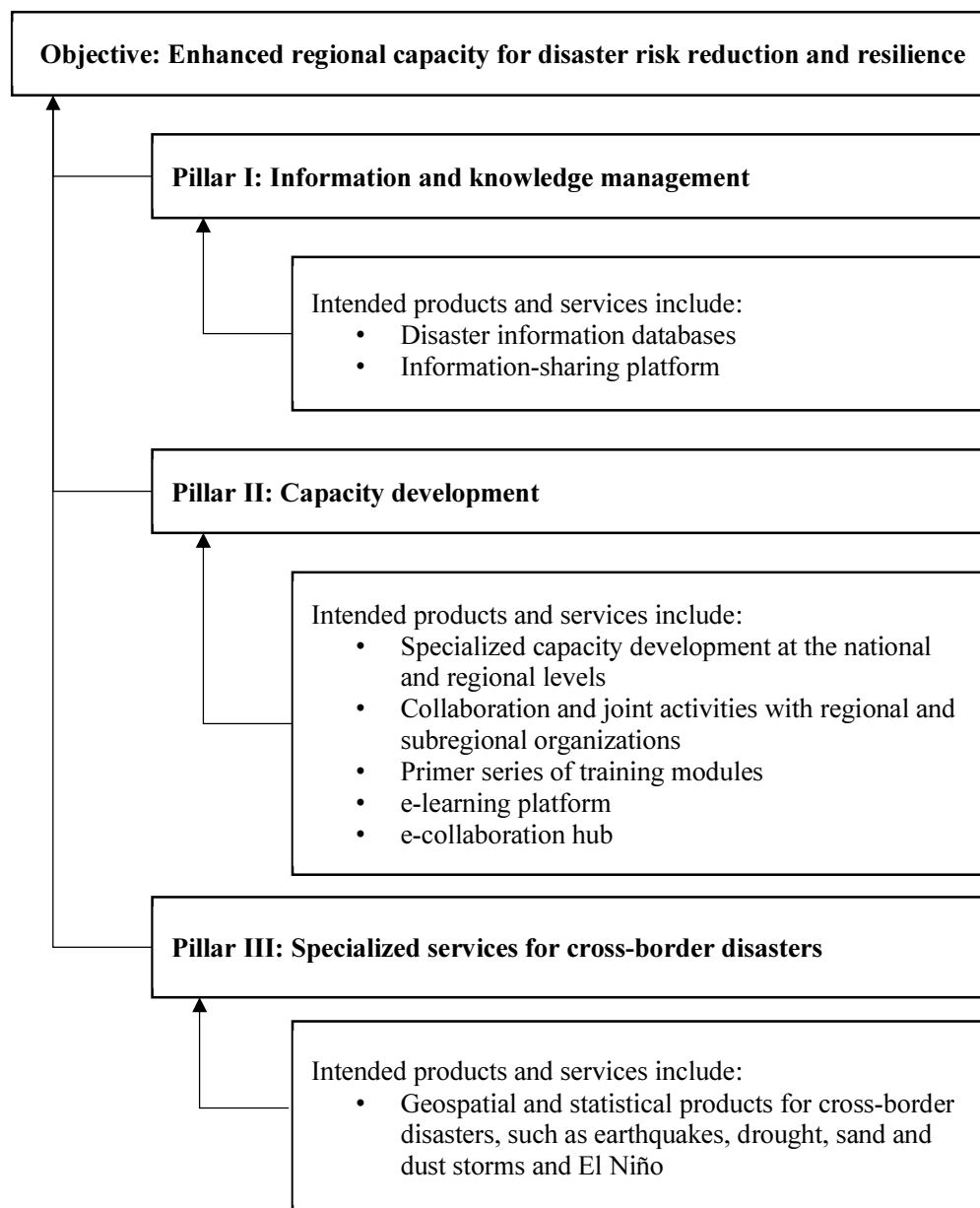
30. The governing structure of the Centre has been established. At its seventy-second session, in May 2016, the Commission elected – along with the host country the Islamic Republic of Iran – the following members and associate members of ESCAP as members of the Governing Council of the Centre for the period 2016-2019: Bangladesh; Cambodia; Macao, China; Nepal; Pakistan; the Philippines; Sri Lanka; and Turkey.

31. The Governing Council held its first session in New Delhi on 2 November 2016. In accordance with the statute of the Centre, set out in the annex to Commission resolution 71/11, and relevant rules of ESCAP, the Council adopted its own rules of procedure.

32. The Centre's programme of work has been put in place. The Governing Council endorsed the Centre's strategic plan and programme direction, which has been aligned closely with the statute of the Centre and the Commission's strategic framework.

33. The Centre's overall strategic plan and programme direction is shown in figure II.

Figure II
Overall strategic plan and programme direction of the Asian and Pacific
Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management



34. The Centre has three priority service lines, aimed at developing the Centre as a leading regional hub that provides (a) an information and knowledge repository for multiple hazards, (b) capacity development in disaster information management, and (c) information services for cross-border disasters. The priorities are realized through regional and South-South cooperation modalities, such as by leveraging the Regional Cooperative Mechanism for Drought Monitoring and Early Warning to deliver services aimed at mitigating damage and losses from sand and dust storms.

35. The focus of the programme and activities of the Centre is to provide capacity development in disaster information management and technical assistance and supplementary information services during major disasters. The Centre will employ a multi-hazard approach with a focus on cross-border disasters – such as earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, cyclones and typhoons,

drought, and sand and dust storms – to address all phases and sectors of disaster risk reduction and management. The Centre will commence its operations with a focus on South and South-West Asia and North and Central Asia, with a view to eventually covering the wider Asian and Pacific region.

36. At its first session, the Governing Council also endorsed the workplan of the Centre and its capacity-building and advocacy activities for 2016-2017 to enhance its visibility, as well as the proposed outputs for the programme of work of ESCAP for the biennium 2018-2019. The Centre's outputs will contribute to the overall objective and expected accomplishments of subprogramme 5. The report of the Governing Council was endorsed by the Commission at its seventy-third session, in May 2017.

37. The Governing Council will hold its second session in Tehran on 21 November 2017. The Governing Council will review the activities and accomplishments of the Centre since its first session, the administrative and financial status of the Centre and its workplan for 2018 and beyond, including on seismic risk reduction and sand and dust storms. The report on the Centre's activities will be submitted to the Commission for its consideration at its seventy-fourth session, in 2018.

C. Raising the visibility of the Centre

38. The visibility of the Centre has been raised through a number of high-level international forums. On 4 November 2016, at the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in New Delhi, a dedicated thematic session was held on disaster information management, jointly organized by ESCAP and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, with the aim of promoting regional cooperation by sharing knowledge, good practices and lessons learned to address gaps and needs in disaster information in the Asia-Pacific region. The thematic session benefited from high-level attendance by eminent panellists from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives and Nepal. The first session of the Governing Council was organized to coincide with the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction to further promote visibility.

39. The thematic session reviewed critical gaps in disaster information and related issues in the region and discussed opportunities for capacity development in disaster information management through regional and South-South cooperation. The International Research Institute of Disaster Science at Tohoku University and the National Institute of Disaster Management of India expressed interest in partnering with the Centre on capacity development activities. Opportunities for partnerships with regional organizations were also put forward, particularly with the Economic Cooperation Organization and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). It is expected that the Centre's partnership network will gradually expand to cover other research and specialized institutions in Asia and the Pacific.

40. At the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction held in Cancún, Mexico, in May 2017, ESCAP activities on disaster risk reduction and resilience were promoted. The Officer-in-Charge of the Centre raised the visibility of the Centre's work on sand and dust storms, and discussed with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat the preparations for the International Conference on Combating Sand and Dust Storms.

41. The Officer-in-Charge of the Centre participated in the International Conference on Combating Sand and Dust Storms, held in Tehran from 3 to 5 July 2017, which was hosted by the Government of the Islamic Republic of

Iran with the cooperation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, as well as other relevant United Nations entities. ESCAP promoted regional and inter-subregional networking for the sharing of experiences in subregional and multilateral cooperation, including by connecting national partners of the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation to regional and global processes and events. The Conference adopted the Tehran Ministerial Declaration, in which it agreed to encourage enhanced regional and international cooperation and partnerships to mitigate and cope with the adverse effects of sand and dust storms, and to seek support from the relevant United Nations organizations to that end. The Conference recognized the role of the Centre in developing human and institutional capacities through strengthened regional cooperation in disaster information management.

42. The Centre also participated in the consultation workshop on combating desertification with special emphasis on dust haze and sand storm in the Economic Cooperation Organization region, organized by that Organization's secretariat in Tehran on 5 and 6 July 2017. The Officer-in-Charge made a presentation on regional cooperation mechanisms, in particular on multi-hazard risk assessment and early warning in drought, desertification and sand and dust storms, and their impacts on Asia and the Pacific. Partnership with the Economic Cooperation Organization for the implementation of the Centre's programme of work was promoted.

43. The Centre, in coordination with the secretariat, is organizing a regional expert consultation on disaster information and knowledge management back to back with the fifth session of the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction, in Bangkok from 9 to 11 October 2017. The regional expert consultation aims to address the challenges emerging from aspects of sand and dust storms that are related to transboundary disasters through peer learning from other subregions of the Asia-Pacific region. Technical input on disaster information management and disaster-related aspects of sand and dust storms will be provided by the Centre.

D. Strengthening capacity in disaster information management

44. The Centre is mandated to provide information management services and specialized capacity development training for transboundary hazards, including sand and dust storms, to address all phases and sectors of disaster risk reduction and management. Analytical reports on managing information and knowledge for disaster risk reduction will be prepared, including a status report on unmet needs and a capacity development strategy, and a report on a regional cooperation mechanism for information management and early warning for sand and dust storms. The analytical work of the Centre on transboundary disaster risk assessment will contribute to intergovernmental discussions on related regional cooperation issues, including on sand and dust storms.

45. ESCAP member States have expressed a need for technical support from the Centre. In implementation of the request from the Government of Bhutan for technical assistance in support of its ongoing seismic microzonation project in Thimphu, the Centre, along with the Building and Housing Research Centre – a member of the Centre's partnership group – is arranging a field mission to Bhutan during the first week of September 2017. The technical assistance project on seismic microzonation will be implemented in close collaboration with the relevant authorities of Thimphu and the departments concerned.

46. The Government of Nepal has also made a request for the Centre to provide technical assistance for its post-earthquake resilient recovery and reconstruction efforts to retrofit cultural monuments. These needs will be addressed during a forthcoming regional workshop on information and knowledge for disaster risk management and seismic risk reduction in the Islamic Republic of Iran, including a study tour to Bam to share experiences in retrofitting of cultural monuments, to be held on 22 November 2017 with the Centre's partnership group.

47. The technical assistance projects in Bhutan and Nepal will benefit from the expertise and resources offered through the Centre's partnership group, which comprises, among others, the Building and Housing Research Centre, the National Cartographic Centre and the International Institute of Earthquake Engineering and Seismology.

48. Disaster-related work on sand and dust storms has been integrated into the Centre's programme of work. It will be based on regional and South-South cooperation and implemented through the Centre's partnership group and relevant United Nations organizations and programmes, namely UNEP, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa.

49. In this respect, the Centre is developing a study to provide an overview of sand and dust storms, their impacts in the subregions of Asia and the Pacific and existing mechanisms. It will outline the ESCAP regional cooperation approach to combating sand and dust storms. It is envisioned to use the experiences gained from an initiative by the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation, during which six ESCAP member States (China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation) jointly addressed various environmental issues, to initiate regional cooperation to combat sand and dust storms in South and South-West Asia and North and Central Asia, involving the member States from the subregions, UNEP, WMO and the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. The initial findings were presented at the International Conference on Combating Sand and Dust Storms.

E. Enhancing collaboration and partnerships

50. To support the above initiatives, the Centre nurtures a broad range of partnerships at the regional, subregional and national levels to scale up innovation and good practices in disaster information management. Strategic partnerships will be built with relevant entities of the United Nations system to enhance coherence across the system, as well as with regional and subregional organizations.

51. The Centre's programme of work with respect to capacity-building capitalizes on the institutional capacities of the Centre's partnership group, and draws upon the expertise, facilities and resources for capacity-building offered by centres of excellence from the Islamic Republic of Iran, such as the Building and Housing Research Centre, the International Institute of Earthquake Engineering and Seismology, the National Cartographic Centre, the Department of Environment and the University of Tehran, among others.

52. As part of its strategy, the Centre builds on the comparative advantages and multisectoral strengths of ESCAP in promoting cooperation among member States towards inclusive and sustainable economic and social

development to provide comprehensive options for information management in various sectors in collaboration with the relevant substantive divisions of ESCAP.

53. The Centre also collaborates with the ESCAP subregional offices, with an initial focus on South and South-West Asia and North and Central Asia, to organize regional and subregional workshops. Collaboration with regional organizations such as the Economic Cooperation Organization in North and Central Asia and the SAARC Disaster Management Centre in South and South-West Asia will be strengthened to support the capacity development process in these subregions. The Centre also collaborates with the United Nations country team in the Islamic Republic of Iran to provide options for operationalizing the Centre's activities in the inception phase, and to link with resources and capacities with respect to disaster risk reduction and resilience-building within the country.

54. Partnerships are being sought with UNEP, WMO and the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification to promote networking and a regional mechanism to address sand and dust storms involving affected member States in the region. In addition, the partnerships with ESCAP, the Inter-Agency Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction, UNDP and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs established through the Thematic Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism will be mobilized.

IV. Issues for consideration

55. The Committee may wish to share views and experiences on approaches for harnessing regional cooperation in disaster information management and to encourage member States to take active roles in mobilizing support for the Centre's activities at the regional and subregional levels and increasing the visibility of the Centre.

56. The Committee may wish to provide the secretariat with further guidance on its future course of action in disaster information management in the region. The Committee may also wish to provide guidance on priority activities for building resilience to disasters and enhancing regional cooperation in disaster information management that could be undertaken by the Centre within its scope and mandate, in alignment with the 2030 Agenda and the Sendai Framework.

57. The Committee is invited to note that, in line with resolution 71/11, the Centre will be evaluated in 2019. The Commission will then assess the performance of the Centre on the basis of the findings of this independent, comprehensive review at its seventy-sixth session, in 2020, and determine continuation of operations of the Centre as a regional institution of the Commission thereafter.