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## Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

### Sixty-ninth session

Bangkok, 25 April-1 May 2013

Agenda item 3 (g)

**Review of issues pertinent to the subsidiary structure of the Commission, including the work of the regional institutions: Social development**

### Draft report

#### Social development

1. In addition to the common documents considered under agenda item 3, the Commission had before it the report of the Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on the Second Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (E/ESCAP/69/11) and the report of the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Final Review of the Implementation of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 2003-2012 (E/ESCAP/69/12).
2. Representatives of the following countries made statements: China; India; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Kiribati; Mongolia; Nepal; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; and Thailand.
3. Regarding the Working Group on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022, the representative of Kiribati delivered a joint statement on behalf of itself, as well as Fiji and Samoa. Similarly, the representative of Thailand delivered a joint statement on behalf of itself, as well as the Governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and the Philippines. On the same matter, the representative of the Central Asian Disability Forum delivered a joint statement on behalf of 18 civil society organizations.
4. The Commission reaffirmed the importance of the social development subprogramme, particularly in regional efforts to reduce poverty and promote inclusive and sustainable development.
5. The Commission commended the secretariat for its successful implementation of the social development subprogramme, which had enhanced the importance of social development in the Commission's work to be on par with that of economic development.

6. The Commission welcomed the progress that had been achieved by members and associate members in implementing a range of social development policies and programmes. Those included programmes to address issues concerning ageing, disability, gender, youth, education, employment creation, social protection and poverty reduction.

7. The Commission noted that the above-mentioned efforts had contributed to supporting achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, and the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 20 to 22 June 2012. The Commission stressed the centrality of social development in the development agenda beyond 2015 for inclusive, equitable and sustainable development.

8. The Commission noted the importance of building an inclusive society by closely linking social development issues with measures that stimulated and expanded employment, in particular for women and youth, through sound macroeconomic policies. Several delegations also stressed the importance of revitalizing economic growth by strengthening the workforce through health, education and capacity-building measures, including the establishment of employment-related legislation and regulations.

9. The Commission noted the successful completion of the second Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 2003-2012, and the successful implementation by members and associate members of the Biwako Millennium Framework and Biwako Plus Five towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific during that decade.

10. The Commission welcomed the successful convening of the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Final Review of the Implementation of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 2003-2012, hosted by the Government of the Republic of Korea, in Incheon from 29 October to 2 November 2012. The Commission noted that the substantive outcome of the High-level Meeting, namely the Ministerial Declaration on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022, and the Incheon Strategy to "Make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, would give new impetus to regional cooperation concerning the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and consider the incorporation of disability concerns in the development agenda beyond 2015. It also noted that the Incheon Strategy with its 10 goals, 27 targets and 62 indicators, provided the Asian and Pacific region, and the world, with the first set of regionally agreed disability-inclusive development goals. For the first time, the Asian and Pacific region would be in a position to track progress towards improving the quality of life, and the fulfillment of the rights, of the region's 650 million persons with disabilities.

11. The Government of the Republic of Korea expressed its deep appreciation for the active and high-level participation of Governments of the ESCAP membership in the 2012 Incheon High-level Intergovernmental Meeting.

12. The Government of the Republic of Korea informed the Commission that it would be sponsoring a resolution on the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with

Disabilities, 2013-2022, and the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific.

13. The Government of Japan pledged to continue supporting the secretariat’s work on disability through the Japan-ESCAP Cooperation Fund.

14. The Commission welcomed the commitment expressed by Governments and civil society organizations that would serve in the Working Group on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022, for the effective implementation of the Ministerial Declaration and the Incheon Strategy.

15. Many delegations expressed their appreciation to the secretariat for its instrumental role on disability issues over the past two decades and its successful organization of the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting at Incheon in 2012.

16. The Commission also noted the strong appreciation expressed by 18 civil society organizations for the secretariat’s effective facilitation of an inclusive, multi-year consultation process in the lead-up to the 2012 Incheon High-level Intergovernmental Meeting, including the preparation of the Incheon Strategy.

17. Several delegations called upon all ESCAP members and associate members to work towards achieving disability-inclusive development, with emphasis on promoting the participation of persons with disabilities in decision-making. Some delegations reported on their new policies and programmes to further promote disability-inclusive development and the realization of disability rights. Those included the harmonization of national legislation with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, formulation of plans and policies in line with a national plan on the empowerment of persons with disabilities, the establishment of a national sign language and training centre, and issuance of guidelines on making all government websites accessible.

18. The Government of Thailand informed the Commission that it would organize, in collaboration with the Government of Australia, ESCAP and the World Bank, a regional consultation, entitled “The Way Forward: Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation on a Disability-Inclusive Development Agenda towards 2015 and Beyond”, to be held in Bangkok, on 15 and 16 May 2013. The outcome of the regional consultation and the Incheon Strategy would be the ESCAP region’s contribution to the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Realization of the Millennium Development Goals and Other Internationally Agreed Development Goals for Persons with Disabilities, which would be held in New York on 23 September 2013. The outcome of the September 2013 High-level Meeting would serve as a critical input on disability-inclusive development to the global process in shaping the development agenda beyond 2015.

19. The Commission emphasized the importance of timely policy responses to the unprecedented pace of the demographic transition towards an ageing society and its socioeconomic implications in much of the Asian and Pacific region.

20. Several delegations informed the Commission of the progress that had been made in addressing the rights of older persons through the establishment of legislative frameworks and the implementation of a range of policies and

programmes. Among those were fiscal schemes to support older persons, including microcredit, national savings and community-based funds, special subsidies and tax-based schemes; social protection systems, including universal pension schemes and health-care services for older persons; national plans and policies for older persons; integration of issues related to older persons, particularly older women, into national development planning; and involvement of local governments, communities, civil society organizations in the provision of care services for older persons.

21. The Commission noted that, despite the progress that had been made, many challenges remained in addressing the concerns of older persons, including the need to strengthen social protection systems and pension coverage in many parts of the region. Some delegations stressed the need for strengthened health-care services and social protection schemes to protect the rights of older persons.

22. The delegation of Mongolia expressed interest in increasing cooperation with ESCAP on population ageing and disability issues, including through projects on the impact of ageing, as well as strengthening the availability and quality of social services and continuing education for older persons.

23. The Commission welcomed the successful convening of the Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on the Second Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in Bangkok from 10 to 12 September 2012.

24. In noting that more than 60 per cent of the world's youth lived in Asia and the Pacific, the Commission recognized the importance of fully integrating youth perspectives into national development, strengthening investments in youth and enhancing their participation in economic, social and political processes. Several delegations emphasized that youth had the potential to boost sustainable economic development, including by contributing to labour force growth and entrepreneurship. To reap those benefits, however, the right combination of education, employment and health policies would be required.

25. The Commission highlighted the central role of education in shaping a competitive and productive workforce. One delegation reported on its achievements in meeting the universal primary education goal. Some delegations reported on their efforts to improve the quality of their education systems. Those delegations stressed that education systems needed a balanced focus on academic pursuits and sports, as well as cultural and spiritual development.

26. The Commission noted the specific efforts of some ESCAP members to facilitate young people's school-to-work transition and reduce their unemployment. Some delegations indicated that they had increased their technical skills training and stepped up efforts to build their human resource base and introduced loan programmes for unemployed youth.

27. The Commission recognized that healthy lifestyles set the foundation for an active and productive life. One delegation highlighted the role of health education in reducing high-risk behaviour among youth, such as the abuse of alcohol, tobacco and drugs. Another delegation emphasized that policies to address youth health concerns should be based on solid evidence, including data disaggregated by the groups affected. The Commission also noted the importance of protecting the reproductive health rights of youth, and removing

legal and social barriers that discriminated against pregnant adolescents and prevented their access to education and to essential services.

28. In noting the complex challenges that youth in the region faced, the Commission requested the secretariat to intensify its work on youth and to accord higher priority to youth development in its programme of work.

29. The Commission emphasized the significance of gender equality and women's empowerment for social development across a range of critical issues, including poverty reduction, employment creation, social protection, health and education. Several delegations reported on national policies and country programmes to address the gender-differentiated impact of emerging social and economic challenges in the Asian and Pacific region.

30. The Commission accorded priority to advancing women's economic empowerment, particularly through entrepreneurship. In commending the secretariat's efforts to promote women's economic participation, the delegation of China informed the Commission of its support in hosting the ESCAP Regional Forum on Creating an Enabling Environment for Women's Economic Empowerment through Entrepreneurship in Asia and the Pacific in Beijing on 17 and 18 April 2013.

31. The Commission noted the importance of mainstreaming gender perspectives into all development policies and programmes, and the good practice of conducting gender budgeting training for government officials at national and local levels. One delegation highlighted the secretariat's efforts in preventing violence against women and, in that regard, commended the secretariat for its support to member States.

32. The Commission emphasized the importance of strengthening social protection as a core strategy for building sustainable, inclusive and resilient societies. It emphasized the need to extend coverage to women, youth, persons with disabilities, older persons and other groups. Several delegations expressed their commitment to establishing legislative frameworks and provisions for social protection, as well as to poverty reduction by extending pension coverage to those living in rural areas. Some delegations reported on progress in enhancing social protection systems, including income support, social pensions, tax-breaks, food security schemes and the provision of health care, particularly for women and youth.

33. The Commission noted the importance of ensuring access to affordable and high-quality health-care services, in both rural and urban areas, for all population groups.

34. The delegation of Thailand informed the Commission of its experience in promoting universal health-care coverage as a means of reducing poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

35. The delegation of Thailand proposed the development and implementation of a regional strategy for achieving universal health-care coverage in the Asian and Pacific region. Such a strategy should take into consideration the following five major concerns: (a) long-term financial sustainability; (b) a comprehensive benefit package consisting of health promotion, disease prevention and rehabilitation, with minimum co-payment; (c) a sound governance structure involving all partners, including patient groups, providers, relevant ministries and academia; (d) the availability of

good-quality health service infrastructure and human resources; and (e) timely and accurate health information for monitoring progress.

36. In recalling the proclamation by the General Assembly of 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives, the delegation of Mongolia informed the Commission of its active role in promoting cooperatives and its interest in collaborating with other member States and with international organizations to support the cooperative movement.

37. The representative of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS informed the Commission of progress that had been made in relation to commitments arising from ESCAP resolutions 66/10 and 67/9 and the 2012 Asia-Pacific High-level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Assessment of Progress against Commitments in the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS and the Millennium Development Goals. The representative informed the Commission that a consultation on creating conducive policy and legal environments for achieving universal access to HIV treatment, care and support covering seven Pacific island countries had been held in Fiji in April 2013, and that a further eight national consultations covering countries in Asia were planned. The integration of HIV and AIDS into the development agenda beyond 2015 could be achieved by highlighting the importance of access to quality and affordable health services and essential medicines; eliminating discrimination; ensuring greater accountability and transparency; and formulating time-bound and measurable objectives.

38. The Commission noted with appreciation the generous financial support of the Governments of China; Japan; the Republic of Korea; and the Russian Federation, as well as Macao, China, to the work of the secretariat in the field of social development.

39. The Commission endorsed the report of the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Final Review of the Implementation of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 2003-2012, which had been held at Incheon, Republic of Korea, from 29 October to 2 November 2012, including the Ministerial Declaration on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022, and the Incheon Strategy to Make the Right Real for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific.

40. The Commission decided that the following 15 member States and 15 civil society organizations would serve as the first 30 members of the Working Group on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022, for the initial term, spanning the period 2013-2017.

(a) Member States:<sup>1</sup>

- (i) Bangladesh;
- (ii) Bhutan;
- (iii) China;
- (iv) Fiji;
- (v) India;

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<sup>1</sup> The Commission also decided that the Government of Myanmar would serve as an observer in the Working Group on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022, for the initial term, spanning the period 2013-2017.

- (vi) Indonesia;
  - (vii) Japan;
  - (viii) Kiribati and Samoa share a seat (Samoa: first 2.5 years; Kiribati: second 2.5 years)
  - (ix) Malaysia;
  - (x) Mongolia;
  - (xi) Pakistan;
  - (xii) Philippines;
  - (xiii) Republic of Korea;
  - (xiv) Russian Federation;
  - (xv) Thailand.
- (b) Civil society organizations:<sup>2</sup>
- (i) Asia and Pacific Disability Forum;
  - (ii) Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability;
  - (iii) ASEAN Disability Forum;
  - (iv) Asia-Pacific DPO United;
  - (v) Central Asia Disability Forum;
  - (vi) South Asian Disability Forum;
  - (vii) Pacific Disability Forum;
  - (viii) Disabled People's International Asia-Pacific;
  - (ix) Inclusion International Asia-Pacific Regional Forum;
  - (x) World Blind Union Asia-Pacific;
  - (xi) World Federation of the Deaf Regional Secretariat in Asia and the Pacific;
  - (xii) World Federation of the Deafblind Asia and the Pacific;
  - (xiii) World Network of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry;
  - (xiv) Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) Consortium;
  - (xv) Rehabilitation International Asia Pacific Region.

41. The Commission endorsed the report of the Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on the Second Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, including the Bangkok Statement on the Asia-Pacific Review of the Implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

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<sup>2</sup> The Commission also decided that the following three civil society organizations would serve as observers in the Working Group on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022, for the initial term, spanning the period 2013-2017: (a) ASEAN Autism Network; (b) Christian Blind Mission; and (c) Community-based Rehabilitation Asia-Pacific Network.