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Agenda item 3 (f)

Review of issues pertinent to the subsidiary structure of the Commission, including the work of the ESCAP regional institutions: Disaster risk reduction

Draft report

Disaster risk reduction

1. In addition to the common documents being considered under agenda item 3, the Commission had before it the report of the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction on its second session (E/ESCAP/68/11) and two information documents: the report of the Typhoon Committee (E/ESCAP/68/INF/6) and the report of the Panel on Tropical Cyclones (E/ESCAP/68/INF/7).

2. Representatives of the following countries made statements: Bangladesh; Cambodia; China; Fiji; India; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Pakistan; Philippines; Russian Federation; and Thailand. The representatives of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the WMO/ESCAP Panel on Tropical Cyclones each delivered a statement.

3. The Commission noted with appreciation the important contribution to regional cooperation in disaster risk reduction made by the ESCAP Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Tsunami, Disaster and Climate Preparedness in Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian Countries, which had been established in 2005 with a \$10 million contribution from Thailand. The Commission recognized the importance of the Fund in promoting regional partnerships for disaster resilience, in particular the contribution to early warning systems through the Regional Integrated Multi-hazard Early Warning System for Africa and Asia. The Commission also noted the decision of the Fund's Advisory Council to approve six projects totalling more than \$2 million.

4. The Commission noted the importance of enhanced regional cooperation in building capacity in the use of space technology and geoinformatics, including the establishment of National Spatial Data Infrastructure for disaster risk reduction and management. The need for regional cooperation to establish a regional Earth observation satellite constellation was highlighted. The Commission was informed about the

focus of Thailand on establishing a regional hub for space-based disaster risk management and human resources development.

5. The Commission also noted that there was limited access to geographic information systems and remote sensing technology services, especially for countries with special needs. In that regard, the Commission was requested to provide technical assistance and capacity development through enhanced regional cooperation.

6. The Commission was informed of the pertinent use of geographic information systems and remote sensing in Pakistan, including for urban and regional planning, environmental management and disaster risk reduction and management. The Commission was requested to provide the necessary support regarding the draft resolution on Asia-Pacific Years of Action for Applications of Space Technology and the Geographic Information System for Disaster Risk Reduction and Sustainable Development, 2012-2017 (E/ESCAP/68/WP.3).

7. The Commission was informed that several countries had made progress in the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters. It was also informed of recent initiatives focused on mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into development by (a) analysing gaps, (b) assessing needs, (c) developing capacities, (d) developing sector-specific guidelines and tool-kits, (e) identifying disaster risk reduction experts, and (f) developing institutional frameworks, financial mechanisms, and community-based disaster risk management systems. All of those things helped in reducing casualties and losses.

8. Some delegations noted that climate-related disasters, such as floods, were destroying development gains. The representative of Thailand informed the Commission that, after the devastating floods of 2011, the importance of an accurate and user-friendly early warning system, risk assessments and damage analyses, a tracking system, and a culture of disaster awareness had been clearly recognized. It was important to enhance capacities with regard to climate risk management, including subnational risk governance, and to strengthen regional cooperation in order to address climate-related threats. The representative of Thailand informed the Commission of ASEAN cooperation on the implementation of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response, which had led to the establishment of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance during the Nineteenth ASEAN Summit (Bali, Indonesia, November 2011). The Commission welcomed the role of Thailand as chair of the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management through March 2013. One delegation noted that technologies for green growth and biodiversity-based management were useful and that networking in that field would be helpful for countries in the region.

9. The delegation of Japan expressed anew its deep gratitude for the warm assistance and solidarity extended by members and associate members of the Commission as well as the secretariat following the devastating great east Japan earthquake and tsunami. The delegation informed the Commission that Japan would hold a high-level international conference on large-scale disasters in July 2012 in the disaster-stricken Tohoku region to discuss ways to maximize capacities for disaster risk reduction and broaden cooperation and coordination among relevant stakeholders. The conference was expected to contribute to a post-Hyogo

Framework for Action which was expected to be agreed at the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, which Japan would host in 2015.

10. The Commission noted that efforts in disaster risk reduction should help member States to build a regional system for disaster risk reduction by supplementing the global efforts of the Inter-Agency Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. The Commission also noted the decision by the Russian Federation to launch a disaster mitigation capacity-building project in North and Central Asia.

11. One delegation also expressed its appreciation for the *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2010*, which had proved useful for policymakers.

12. It was noted that more training on practical disaster assessment methodologies would have a positive impact on the capacities of member States.

13. The delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran informed the Commission that the secretariat had provided close cooperation and support for the implementation of Commission resolution 67/4 on the establishment of the Asian and Pacific centre for the development of disaster information management. The delegation also informed the Commission that its Parliament had approved the establishment of the Centre and the first portion of the budget. At the regional level, consultations with the ESCAP subregional offices and partners, such as the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, were ongoing with support and coordination from the secretariat. The delegation invited member States and institutions in the region and international partners to participate, in various possible ways, in the process leading to the establishment of the Centre and in its future activities.

14. Some delegations stressed that the vulnerability of small island developing States had increased but that that had not been matched by the capacity of those States to cope. One delegation called for special attention to countries with special needs, in particular the developing island States in the Pacific, and highlighted the need for various forms of assistance to address the vulnerabilities.

15. One delegation suggested three priorities that the secretariat could adopt: (a) optimizing resource utilization to avoid duplication; (b) paying attention to countries with special needs, especially the Pacific island countries; and (c) promoting substantial cooperation among disaster-prone countries in prevention, preparedness and post-disaster reconstruction.

16. The delegation of India, while noting the valuable work carried out by the Regional Specialized Meteorological Centre to provide tropical cyclone-related forecasts and advisories to countries in the region, expressed support for the plan of the Panel on Tropical Cyclones to establish an integrated drought management programme to include various aspects of drought as well as socioeconomic impacts at the national and subnational levels. The delegation informed the Commission that, upon request from the Panel, India would support training programmes in tropical cyclone and storm research and forecasting systems for coastal areas.

17. The representative of the Panel on Tropical Cyclones took the view that climate change was one of the greatest challenges facing the Asia-Pacific region, as evidenced by a number of recent large-scale disasters. As

a result, the Panel on Tropical Cyclones would have more important roles to play, through its intergovernmental process, in promoting measures to improve warning systems, disseminating technical information on research, and improving forecast-related operations to mitigate the socioeconomic impact of tropical cyclone-related disasters.

18. The representative of WMO expressed concern that many national meteorological and hydrological services in the region were marginalized in the larger discussion of disaster risk reduction and climate change at the global level despite major loss of life and economic damage caused by disasters. He informed the Commission that WMO was planning to hold an extraordinary session of the World Meteorological Congress, which would focus on the implementation plans and governing structure of the Global Framework for Climate Services. ESCAP was invited to attend the session, which would be held in Geneva in 2012.

19. The Commission welcomed and endorsed the suggestion of the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction at its second session that the secretariat and the United Nations Development Programme and their development partners increase their support to building national capacities in the collection and analysis of disaster data for hazard and vulnerability assessments, disaster preparedness, mitigation and contingency planning, as countries were facing challenges in obtaining access to the relevant data.

20. The Commission expressed satisfaction with the work of the secretariat in disaster risk reduction in the region and appreciation for the efforts of the secretariat in the area of space applications for disaster risk reduction and development.
