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REVIEW OF ISSUES PERTINENT TO THE SUBSIDIARY STRUCTURE OF THE COMMISSION: INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

(Agenda item 2 (e))

Draft report

1.   The Commission had before it the report of the Committee on Information and Communications Technology on its first session (E/ESCAP/65/7) and the summary of progress in the implementation of Commission resolutions relating to information and communications technology (E/ESCAP/65/8).

2.   The Commission recognized the important role played by information and communications technology (ICT), including space-based technology, in supporting inclusive and sustainable economic and social development and in ensuring effective disaster management in Asia and the Pacific. The Commission noted the progress of its member States in the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society, and recognized the necessity of strengthening regional cooperation to assist its member States in human resources development and capacity-building. In that connection, the Commission expressed its general support for the findings and recommendations of the Committee and requested the secretariat to consider implementing the recommendations in the context of the current and future programmes of work of the secretariat.

3.   One delegation noted that, given the global financial and economic crisis, the development of the ICT sector was of great importance in achieving high economic growth in the long term. Some delegations also expressed their commitment and continued support to the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee, in particular enhanced international cooperation, in that regard. One delegation appreciated the role of ICT for food security and requested the secretariat to report on the progress of cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and other agencies in that regard.

4.   In building an information society, the Commission recognized the importance of ICT human resources development and the important role of the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (APCICT). Several delegations requested that the capacity development

programmes of APCICT, including the Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders, be implemented effectively. One delegation supported the recommendation of the Committee for the development of a new module on ICT for disaster risk reduction as well as the development of cooperation with the Inter-Agency Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR) Regional Office for East Asia, which would be opened in Songdo International City, Republic of Korea, in August 2009.

5.   The delegation of India offered to share India's ICT expertise and experience in the development of ICT with other member States and to cooperate with the secretariat in such areas as multi-purpose community e-centres, Pacific connectivity, human resources development, implementation of the Regional Action Plan towards the Information Society in Asia and the Pacific, facilitating private-public partnerships, and initiatives on ICT applications for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It also announced its decision to provide financial support to APCICT.

6.   One delegation informed the Commission that the leaders of the Pacific Island Forum had agreed in their communiqué that ICT was a priority. It was noted that lack of ICT capacity and expertise continued to be a major challenge in the Pacific. In that context, the delegation appreciated the support provided by APCICT, in cooperation with the Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission, in building ICT capacity through the organization of training workshops in the Cook Islands in 2008 and in Tonga in 2009. The delegation requested APCICT to continue its assistance in ICT capacity development for the Pacific island countries.

7.   Some delegations highlighted the importance of ICT industry development, ICT applications, including space-based applications, such as e-commerce/e-business, e-government, e-tourism, e-health, e-literacy and e-agriculture, for sustainable socio-economic development, and relevant supporting components such as enabling policy, human resources development, infrastructure development, information security and knowledge-sharing. The delegation of the Russian Federation informed the Commission of various initiatives that its country had been implementing to support public-private partnerships in ICT, such as an investment fund of $1 billion set up in 2007 to promote small businesses, the establishment of electronic centres in remote areas through the system of post offices to provide Internet access and the creation of industrial parks. According to the adopted national strategy on ICT development, it was expected that the Russian Federation would be among the top 20 ICT-capable countries by 2015.

8.   The Commission recognized the critical role of ICT, including space-based technology, in disaster risk reduction efforts. Several delegations called for strengthened partnership and cooperative mechanisms in developing an integrated ICT-based information system for disaster risk management and enhanced regional cooperation, especially in the area of regional early warning and information-sharing. The delegation of Japan cited initiatives promoted by its country, such as the Global Flood Alert System aimed at reducing damage caused by water-related disaster hazards and Sentinel Asia coordinated by the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA). The delegation also updated the Commission on cooperation between ESCAP and JAXA in promoting space-based information and products for disaster management through Sentinel Asia. The delegation of Thailand informed the Commission of the launching of an earth observation satellite, THEOS, and the country's readiness to provide satellite data for disaster monitoring and mitigation.

9. Several delegations emphasized the need for establishing a structure/mechanism to assist implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at both the national and the regional levels, to monitor related initiatives and identify gaps and challenges and cooperation needs at the regional level. Those issues could be addressed through a regional mechanism such as an inter-agency working group. Those delegations also requested the secretariat to assist countries to establish such a structure at the national level where none existed.