



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Sixty-fifth session
23-29 April 2009
Bangkok

**MANAGEMENT ISSUES: STRENGTHENING THE UNITED NATIONS
DEVELOPMENT PILLAR AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL:
PROPOSED ESCAP SUBREGIONAL OFFICES**

(Agenda item 4 (c))

Draft report

1. The Commission had before it the proposed road map for the establishment of new subregional offices in East and North-East Asia, North and Central Asia, and South and South-West Asia (E/ESCAP/65/20), and a report by an independent consultant on the most feasible and strategic locations for the new ESCAP subregional offices (E/ESCAP/65/20/Add.1 and Corr.1).

2. In her introductory remarks on the issue, the Executive Secretary informed the Commission that the secretariat had begun the process for the establishment of the three new subregional offices in accordance with General Assembly resolution 63/260 of 24 December 2008, in which, among other things, the Assembly had approved additional regular budget resources for the establishment and operation of the three new subregional offices and the strengthening of the existing subregional office for the Pacific. With regard to the process, the secretariat had adopted a phased approach in its review.

3. The Commission was informed that every effort had been made by the secretariat to ensure a transparent process of review. The secretariat had informed governments, through both written communication and through information provided to the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission, that it had intended to conduct an impartial review of all options for the locations of the new subregional offices. It had also engaged an independent consultant to review the most strategic and feasible options for the locations, including offers from interested Governments.

4. The Commission noted that the report by the independent consultant had recommended that the secretariat explore and consider in greater depth the "preferred" option for each subregion. That would entail undertaking site visits to that option and, if necessary, to the alternative option for each subregion. The final decision in determining the most appropriate location would be conditional upon the conclusion of the relevant agreements with the prospective host Governments. The offices were expected to be established and operational by the end of 2009 so they would be ready to deliver the programme of work for the forthcoming 2010-2011 biennium.

5. The Commission welcomed the General Assembly's decision to strengthen the United Nations development pillar at the regional level through support for three new ESCAP subregional offices, and the strengthening of the ESCAP subregional office for the Pacific. Several delegations expressed the view that the decision would enhance the subregional presence of ESCAP and increase its effectiveness in delivering a more balanced programme of work in the different subregions.

6. The Commission expressed appreciation for the secretariat's efforts in preparing the proposal to the General Assembly to strengthen the United Nations development pillar at the regional level, and for making preparations for the establishment of the new subregional offices.

7. Several delegations expressed appreciation for the road map prepared by the secretariat as well as for the report of the independent consultant that had been prepared to support deliberations on what was a very difficult and complex issue.

8. The delegation of Mongolia expressed the view that the staffing of the subregional offices should follow an equitable geographical distribution. It expressed the intention of following the staffing process closely, especially regarding the subregional office for East and North-East Asia.

9. The delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea expressed the view that the subregional office for East and North-East Asia should be established with the agreement of member States in that subregion, in a location convenient to all the countries of the subregion in terms of factors such as alignment with United Nations system structure, transport connections and proximity to other countries in the subregion.

10. The delegation of the Republic of Korea expressed disagreement with the recommendations of the report by the independent consultant as far as that document related to the East and North-East Asian subregion. In the view of that delegation, the unique experience of the Republic of Korea as a developing country that would also become a donor country and member of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 2010, on the basis of its commitment to increase overseas development assistance, positioned it well to bridge developed and developing countries. Incheon, Republic of Korea, offered a number of advantages from a practical point of view: the city was a regional air hub with attractive facilities and had offered a generous package, valued at over \$2 million, to support the subregional office.

11. The delegation of China expressed its support for the establishment of the subregional office for East and North-East Asia wherever that office was located.

12. The delegation of the Russian Federation expressed appreciation that the consultant's report had appropriately included the country in both the subregion for North and Central Asia and the subregion for East and North-East Asia.

13. The delegation of Kazakhstan assured the secretariat of its support in the process of establishing the new ESCAP subregional offices.

14. The delegation of Kiribati, on behalf of Pacific delegations, welcomed the additional support that had been provided to the subregional office for the Pacific under the United Nations development pillar, and acknowledged the efforts of the Executive Secretary to improve the impact of the secretariat's work in that subregion. The Pacific delegations were of the view that the ESCAP Pacific Operations Centre

was strategically placed to interact and respond more effectively to the needs of the Pacific countries.

15. The delegation of Fiji requested additional information on the specific areas of work in which the subregional office for the Pacific would be strengthened.

16. The delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran expressed the view that the distribution of the ESCAP regional institutions and subregional offices should be proportionate to strike a balance between subregions and to avoid unwanted radical centralization, and also stressed the need to expand the ESCAP domain of activities to uncovered areas of Asia and the Pacific, particularly south-west areas.

17. The delegation of Pakistan, while appreciating the independent consultant for preparing a report and giving his time and efforts, expressed its dissatisfaction with the report. That delegation was of the view that the report had procedural flaws, lacked information and was contradictory to the terms of reference laid down for the consultant for establishment of the subregional offices. That delegation further noted that the report, as submitted by the consultant, was only desk work and that no field visits had been conducted. That delegation noted that, in the South and South-West Asian subregion, willingness to host a subregional office had been shown by only two countries, but that the consultant had recommended a third country that had not shown its willingness, as the most feasible option. That delegation expressed the view that that was totally in contradiction to the terms of reference laid down for the consultant for recommending the location of the subregional offices. That delegation further expressed the opinion that Islamabad would provide a conducive atmosphere for a subregional office, among other reasons, also because of a substantial presence of diplomatic missions and multilateral development agencies and work that had already started on a new air hub in the city. In the view of that delegation, the consultant's report had treated issues such as the possibilities of air connections through Dubai inconsistently in its analysis of different countries.

18. The delegation of India informed the Commission that, if so decided, India would be ready to host the subregional office for South and South-West Asia. It referred to India's long and close association with ESCAP as one of the four developing country founding members, and its hosting of the Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology. That delegation viewed as questionable any role for the subregional office for South and South-West Asia in supporting the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, as might have been presumed by the consultant's report.

19. The delegations of Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka and Turkey expressed reservations about the procedure followed by the secretariat and the independent consultant in considering States that had not put forward offers to host subregional offices as part of the review of the most feasible and strategic locations for those offices.

20. The delegation of Sri Lanka expressed the view that the procedure lacked transparency, especially with regard to the office for South and South-West Asia, where the consultant had recommended a country that had not submitted an offer to the secretariat as the preferred option, even though Sri Lanka had submitted an offer and was considered by the consultant as a feasible location.

21. On that issue, the Commission was informed that, to ensure transparency, the secretariat had invited all member States to submit offers and commissioned an impartial review for discussion in the Commission. The overriding purpose was to select the most feasible and strategic locations for the offices, with offers from

interested Governments being one significant consideration. In addition, since selection of a location was subject to a headquarters agreement being concluded with the host country, the secretariat deemed it desirable to consider a range of possible options.

22. The delegations of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Korea expressed the view that the establishment of subregional offices was an important task for ESCAP that should be considered carefully on the basis of a thorough assessment from a long-term perspective. In that context, the delegation of the Republic of Korea expressed the view that the secretariat should reassess the merits and demerits of each candidate city through field trips and submit a revised road map and report for the consideration of member countries. The delegation of Pakistan expressed the view that, from a strategic point of view and a long-term perspective, Pakistan had always provided a conducive atmosphere and played a key part in United Nations activities around the world, upholding the principles of the United Nations.

23. The delegations of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea and Turkey expressed the view that the secretariat should undertake site visits to all countries that had submitted offers to host subregional offices before a decision was taken on the locations. On that issue, the Executive Secretary responded that the secretariat would strongly consider conducting site visits to all countries that had submitted proposals to host subregional offices, as well as those recommended by the independent consultant, before taking a decision.

24. The delegations of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation expressed the view that the locations of the subregional offices should be based on consensus among the countries in the various subregions, as expressed in a resolution or decision of the Commission.

25. The delegations of Pakistan and Turkey expressed the view that a decision on the locations of the new subregional offices should be deferred to allow the field visits to take place and a decision could be reached at the sixty-sixth session of the Commission.

26. In response to a question from some delegations on the procedure and next steps, the secretariat clarified that the General Assembly had mandated ESCAP to establish the subregional offices, which should be operational by the end of 2009 to deliver their programme of work for the 2010-2011 biennium. In the absence of a consensus in the Commission on issues such as the proposed locations, and on the basis of the procedure followed for the establishment of the subregional office in the Pacific, the secretariat would proceed with the establishment of the offices, taking into account the comments made by delegations at the current Commission session.

27. The Commission encouraged the secretariat to continue its efforts in establishing those offices in a timely manner, in consultation with member States in the different subregions. The delegation of Pakistan also expressed the view that these offices should be established in accordance with the terms of reference laid down for the consultant for recommending the location of the subregional offices.

28. The Commission and the Executive Secretary expressed their strong appreciation to Governments that had submitted offers to host the new ESCAP subregional offices. Discussions in the Commission on the issue had demonstrated the high priority and importance that delegations attached to those offices.