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Seoul, Republic of Korea

REPORT OF THE PREPARATORY MEETING OF SENIOR OFFICIALS

(Item 6 of the provisional agenda)

This document has been issued without formal editing

I. MATTERS CALLING FOR ACTION BY THE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE OR BROUGHT TO ITS ATTENTION

1. The Meeting agreed in principle with the assessment presented in the review of the state of the environment in Asia and the Pacific, which revealed that the current pattern of economic growth is putting pressure on the environmental sustainability of the region. Therefore, the urgent need for the region is to pursue environmentally sustainable economic growth as required for achieving internationally agreed goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Meeting noted that MDGs one and seven aimed respectively at reducing poverty and ensuring environmental sustainability, and Millennium Development Goal eight, committing OECD/DAC donors to an ODA target of 0.7 per cent of the Gross National Income (GNI), and noted that these goals are mutually supportive and commonly linked with gender issues.
2. The Meeting noted that the existing poverty in the region was one of the major obstacles to sustainable development, and underlined the need for a balanced growth based on enhanced synergies of the three pillars of sustainable development, i.e. economic growth, social development and environmental protection.
3. The Meeting also noted that the diversity of conditions, approaches capacities and methods existing in different parts of the region should be recognized.
4. The Meeting recognized the immediate need for undertaking actions in areas where technological know-how and resources were available for environmental safeguards such as the introduction of clean technologies and promotion of sustainable consumption and production with increased ecological and natural resources efficiency and enhanced waste management, in particular hazardous and non-biodegradable wastes.
5. The Meeting noted that assistance for capacity-building, transfer of technology and provision of financial resources to countries with economies in transition, developing countries, including Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) for the pursuit of environmentally sustainable economic growth needs to be increased in areas such as sustainable and clean energy development, combating climate change, resource conservation and eco-efficiency.
6. The Meeting emphasized the need for strengthening regional, subregional and bilateral cooperation for addressing common environmental problems with common solutions, through partnership between stakeholders and wide public participation, promoting

technology transfer, information networking and capacity-building in achieving environmentally sustainable economic growth (“Green Growth”). In this context, “Green Growth” is understood as sustainable development as elaborated in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI).

7. The Meeting noted that essential policy reforms were needed to improve the environmental performance and ecological efficiency in a number of states for achieving environmentally sustainable economic growth in Asia and the Pacific region.

8. The Meeting recommended that the countries of the region should undertake further efforts towards protecting and restoring the environment. It also recommended improving the quality of life of all people living in both rural and urban areas with special focus on vulnerable groups such as children and women.

9. The Meeting noted the concerns of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in respect of climate change and sea level rise, floods and hurricanes, non-biodegradable waste management and their strong commitment to pursuing environmentally sustainable development path based on sustainable use of natural resources and ensuring the SIDS economic self-reliance.

10. The Meeting also noted that the least developed countries have encountered major handicaps and challenges in their quest for attaining sustainable development. The Meeting, therefore, recommended that enhanced financing, technology transfer, particularly cost-effective technology, and capacity- building efforts would be necessary particularly for the LDCs and countries with economies in transition for ensuring attainment of environmentally sustainable economic growth by these countries.

11. Noting the importance of the critical environment and sustainable development issues and the implication of global trends, the Meeting recommended that those concerns and priorities should be reflected in the national, subregional and regional action programmes.

12. The Meeting recommended that the Ministers adopt the draft Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific 2005 (Annex I) providing various options and alternatives drawn from earlier multilateral agreements to encourage voluntary implementation, taking into account the diversity in development needs and capabilities of countries.

13. The Meeting recommended that the Ministers adopt the Regional Implementation Plan for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific Region, 2006-2010 (Annex II) and also recommended to undertake steps to implement the Regional Implementation Plan for strengthening the capacities for environmentally sustainable economic growth at regional, sub regional and national level.

14. The Meeting further recommended that the progress on the implementation of the Regional Implementation Plan should be reviewed from time to time and a comprehensive review should be conducted at the sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development to be held in 2010.

15. The Meeting recommended that the Ministers endorse the draft Seoul Initiative on Environmentally Sustainable Economic Growth (Green Growth) (Annex III).

II. PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING

A. Briefing session on recent tsunami and regional response strategy

16. A special briefing session on the recent tsunami in South Asia and the regional response strategy was held at the outset of the Senior Officials Meeting. The briefing sessions presented an overview of the tragic consequences and extent of devastation caused by the recent tsunami, and the response strategies to address the risk of natural hazards for sustainable development in the Asia and Pacific region. The session also included discussion on emerging issues on the tsunami and other recent natural disasters in the region and priority linkages to the Millennium Declaration.

17. The Meeting emphasized the importance of promoting disaster risk management and regional cooperation for better disaster preparedness for sustainable development in the region.

18. The Meeting also recommended integration of disaster risk management into the formulation of policies and strategies for sustainable development.

B. Review of the state of the environment in Asia and the Pacific

(Item 4 of the provisional agenda)

19. The Meeting had before it the document E/ESCAP/SO/MCED(05)/1, Review of the State of the Environment in Asia and the Pacific prepared by ESCAP. The Meeting commended the secretariat for providing well prepared document and the comprehensive

review of the situation in the region related to the unsustainable economic growth and its impact on the carrying capacity of the environment.

20. The Meeting agreed that the review provided a basis for the development of the Regional Implementation Plan for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific, 2006-2010 to be discussed under agenda item 7.

21. The Meeting observed that despite the success achieved by the countries in improving their environmental performance, environmental sustainability is deteriorating owing to unsustainable economic growth, overall rapid population increase, significant pace of urbanization, industrialization and unplanned utilization of natural resources. The latter trend resulted in the deterioration of the environment in the region and had exerted considerable pressure on its carrying capacity with irreversible losses of natural resources in some areas. The Meeting also noted that natural resources and ecosystem services that make possible all economic activity were of immense economic value; some are literally invaluable, as they have no known substitutes.

22. In recognition of the immense diversity in the Asia and Pacific region in terms of economic development of the countries and their natural resources endowment, the Meeting noted that environmental sustainability and sustainable use of natural resources were needed to address poverty.

23. The Meeting highlighted the pressure on the coastal and marine environment and emphasized the importance of better management of marine resources, in particular fishery resources.

24. The Meeting also recommended that there was a need for a balanced growth based on enhanced synergies of the three pillars of sustainable development, i.e. economic growth, social development and environmental protection with wide promotion of clean technologies, improved waste management and natural resources efficiency.

25. The Meeting also recognized that some of the current problems, which the Small Island Developing States were facing currently and the threat on their pristine environment stem to certain extent from the predominantly aggressive economic development strategies pursued by a large number of countries in the world. The SIDS were also faced with acute environmental problems resulting from coral bleaching and natural disasters such as floods and hurricanes, as well as problems related to non-biodegradable waste products.

26. The Meeting noted the review was an important reference document, which provided a valuable information to assess the environmental conditions and trends. It also underlined the importance of regional collaboration in data sharing and developing various indicators of environmental sustainability.

C. Review of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, including Phnom Penh Regional Platform on Sustainable Development for Asia and the Pacific, the recommendations of the fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, 2000 and the Kitakyushu Initiative for a Clean Environment

(Item 5 of the agenda)

27. The Meeting had before it the documents E/ESCAP/SO/MCED(05)/2, Review of the Implementation of the Outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, including Phnom Penh Regional Platform on Sustainable Development for Asia and the Pacific, and E/ESCAP/SO/MCED(00)/3, Review of the Implementation of the Kitakyushu Initiative for a Clean Environment. The Meeting commended the secretariat for preparing these documents which provided a very good basis for discussion. The Meeting also agreed in general that the analysis and recommendations of those documents could be used as a guide in the finalization of the Regional Implementation Plan for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific, 2006-2010 to be discussed under agenda item 7.

28. The Meeting noted the information presented by various delegations on their efforts towards sustainable development and implementation of their environment and sustainable development strategies and action plans, ratification of international environmental treaties and conventions and formulation of supporting national action plans for their implementation and other policy initiatives. It noted that the countries of the region have made commendable strides in the implementation of WSSD and the JPoI and took measures for improving the existing institutional mechanisms for promoting sustainable development.

29. While noting the continuous efforts and measures undertaken towards achieving sustainable development by the countries with economies in transition, the Meeting recognized the complex problems these countries were facing and the importance of enhanced subregional cooperation initiatives as the most appropriate mechanism for tackling the acute environmental problems, such as the Regional Environmental Action Plan for Central Asia and the Barbados Programme of Action for the Small Island Developing States.

30. The meeting also noted with appreciation the efforts of the Islamic State of Afghanistan in its monumental and challenging reconstruction and rehabilitation programme considering the extensive degradation of all natural resources and its relentless strive towards sustainable development and environmental protection. The Meeting noted with appreciation the support provided by the international community to the Islamic State of Afghanistan.

31. The Meeting agreed that a shift in the economic growth approach was needed. In that context it noted the need for utilizing the potential of local technological know-how, particularly in new and renewable sources of energy, traditional conservation based life styles and attitudes, and sharing of experiences was needed. The example with the diverse applications of the coconut plantations was provided in favor of wide promotion of such approach. The Meeting also noted that such shift would highly benefit the Small Island Developing States.

32. The Meeting considered pursuing environmentally sustainable economic growth through enhanced ecological and resource efficiency as important opportunity to generate additional financial resources to be mobilized for supporting poverty reduction measures. Related to that, the Meeting underlined the important role private sector and civil society need to play in promoting this process.

33. The Meeting also noted that the potential of various Multilateral Environmental Agreements, such as the Kyoto Protocol, Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) and the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade (PICs) could be more efficiently utilized in Asia and the Pacific region for furthering sustainable development and environmentally sustainable economic growth.

34. The Meeting noted with appreciation the achievements of the member states during the implementation of the Kitakyushu Initiative and recommended that the initiative was a good example of successful partnership between local governments, private sector and the local communities in attaining clean urban environment and environmental sustainability. The Meeting noted with appreciation the commitment of the Government of Japan to continue supporting its further implementation and the interest of new cities to join the Kitakyushu Network.

D. Draft Ministerial Declaration

(Item 6 of the provisional agenda)

35. The Meeting had before it the documents E/ESCAP/SO/MCED(05)/7, Theme Paper on Achieving Environmentally Sustainable Growth in Asia and the Pacific and E/ESCAP/SO/MCED(05)/4, Draft Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, 2005.

36. The Meeting commended the secretariat for providing a comprehensive and well written document on Environmentally Sustainable Economic Growth. The Meeting appreciated the analysis on the theme of the Conference. It noted that the environmental carrying capacity of the region was limited, and the pressure exerted by population and unsustainable economic growth was increasing. The Meeting noted that despite the evident stress on the natural environment and the commitment of member countries to MDG 7 of ensuring environmental sustainability, the challenge of poverty reduction as reflected by MDG 1, required the region's economies to continue to grow. The theme paper went further elaborating on the elements of the "Green Growth".

37. The Meeting commended the secretariat for providing a very good and comprehensive draft of the Ministerial Declaration, following the recommendations of the Regional Preparatory Meeting reflecting the critical issues as described in the Theme Paper and following up on suggested measures and policy response and strategies towards achieving environmentally sustainable economic growth.

38. The Meeting noted that the objective of the Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, 2005 was to acknowledge the special situation of the Asia-Pacific region in defining the commitment and support of national Governments towards the realization of environmentally sustainable economic growth as a major prerequisite for further implementation of the commitments to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the Millennium Development Goals 1 (poverty reduction) and 7 (environmental sustainability). In particular, it noted that the declaration would provide the momentum for governments to take appropriate policy measures which would accord a high priority to environmentally sound and sustainable development.

39. The Meeting reviewed and amended the draft as contained in Annex I.

E. Development of a Regional Implementation Plan for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific, 2006-2010

(Item 7 of the agenda)

40. The Meeting had before it the document E/ESCAP/SO/MCED(05)/5 entitled Draft Regional Implementation Plan for Sustainable Development, 2006-2010.

41. The Meeting noted that the Regional Implementation Plan for sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific (RIP) is intended to promote regional cooperation and to strengthen national capacities in pursuing environmentally sustainable economic growth through enhanced ecological and resources efficiency. It has proposed programme areas at the regional and subregional and national level that may be necessary to support the process, as well as regional and subregional initiatives to which various international partners have committed to provide support.

42. The Meeting also noted that the Regional Implementation Plan is the fifth in a series of regional strategies and action programmes adopted by the Ministerial Conferences beginning in 1985. The RIP has been drawn on the experiences gained through previous regional action programmes and strategies and taking into consideration major environmental and development problems, trends and findings through various studies of ESCAP and intergovernmental recommendations.

43. The Meeting noted that the RIP included a set of regional and subregional initiatives as the important tool for its implementation focusing on various priority areas to address some of the acute environmental and natural disasters related problems, as well as to create favorable conditions for achieving environmentally sustainable economic growth.

44. While commending the secretariat's efforts in preparing the document, the Meeting provided a general direction to the draft Regional Implementation Plan document, which is attached as an Annex II to this report.

45. While recognizing the diversity of the region, the Meeting noted that the Regional Implementation Plan provided a framework to address common concerns and priorities in national environmental planning.

46. The Meeting expressed appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Korea for the proposed Seoul Initiative on Environmentally Sustainable Economic Growth: "Green Growth" and expressed its support to the establishment of the Seoul Initiative Network on green growth (SINGG) to exchange best practices and promote capacity building.

III. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

A. Opening, duration and organization of the Meeting

47. The Senior Officials Meeting was held in Seoul, the Republic of Korea from 24 to 26 March 2005. The Meeting was held in preparation for the Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific 2005, to be held in Seoul from 28 to 29 March 2005.

48. The Executive Secretary of ESCAP warmly welcomed the delegations to the Preparatory Meeting of Senior Officials for the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific. He expressed his appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Korea for generously hosting the Conference and for the excellent arrangements and gracious hospitality. The Executive Secretary thanked the collaborating organizations for their support in the organization of the Conference. Noting the tragic impact of the December 2004 Tsunami on many of the member states, the Executive Secretary described the omnipotence of nature and the importance of learning to respond to these events by enhancing our preparedness for disasters by integrating disaster management in socio-economic planning and development processes. In his statement, the Executive Secretary underlined the remarkable economic growth in the region, which contributed to poverty reduction and social development in many parts of the region. However, he also noted that unsustainable growth exerted increasing pressure on the natural resources and the carrying capacity of the environment. Natural resources and ecosystem services are of immense economic value; some are literally priceless, since they have no known substitutes. Thus, the Executive Secretary emphasized the importance of moving away from a “grow first, clean up later” approach to a shift towards environmentally sustainable economic growth through a partnership with civil society and stakeholders, including the private sector. The Executive secretary called for further strengthening the subregional and regional cooperation for common solution to common problems.

49. In his welcoming statement, H.E. Mr Kwak Kyul-Ho, Minister of Environment of the Republic of Korea emphasized that achieving sustainable development through balanced development of the economy, society and environment is the greatest challenge of the day. H.E. the Minister underlined the invaluable opportunity for the delegates to establish achievable and concrete action plans, which will further sustainable development in the region. Related to that, H.E. Mr Kwak referred to the proposed Seoul Initiative on Environmentally Sustainable Economic growth: “Green Growth” as an opportunity for

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strengthened regional cooperation to promote environmentally sustainable economic growth and for creating win-win synergy between environment and development. H. E. Mr Kwak explained that the Seoul Initiative would include recommendations for balancing environment and economy, practicing sustainable production consumption and improving environmental sustainability.

B. Attendance

50. The Preparatory Meeting was attended by representatives of the following members and associate members of ESCAP: Afghanistan, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Fiji, France, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nauru, Nepal, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Samoa, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Viet Nam, Cook Islands, Guam, Macao, China, and Niue. A representative of Austria also attended.

51. The representatives of the following United Nations bodies and specialized agencies also attended: United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, United Nations Industrial Development Organization, World Bank, World Health Organization and World Meteorological Organization.

52. The representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations also attended: Asian Development Bank, Asian and Pacific Coconut Community, Association of South East Asian Nations, European Commission, Colombo Plan Secretariat, Forum Secretariat, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme, South Pacific Regional Environment Programme, International Centre for Environment Development, Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, and World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

53. The representatives of the following non-governmental organizations, other entities and observers also attended: International Alliance of Women, International Council of Women, International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, World Veterans Federation,

World Muslim Congress, Muslim World League, Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia, Citizens' Alliance for Consumer Protection of Korea, International Water Management Institute, Japan Water Forum, Kitakyushu Forum on Asian Women, Korea Women's Environmental Network, Bundung Vocational Youth Centre and Pacific Disaster Centre.

C. Election of officers

54. The Meeting elected Mr Park Young Woo (Republic of Korea) Chairperson, Ms Liana Bratasida (Indonesia), Mr Sudhir Mital (India), Mr Luo Delong (China), Mr Tu'u'u Ieti Taule'alo (Samoa), and Mr Sergei Samoylov (Uzbekistan) Vice Chairpersons and Mr Muhammad Zahir Shah (Pakistan) Rapporteur.

D. Agenda

55. The Meeting adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the Meeting.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda.
4. Review of the state of the environment in Asia and the Pacific:
 - (a) Overview and trends;
 - (b) Subregional review.
5. Review of the implementation of:
 - (a) The outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, including the Phnom Penh Regional Platform on Sustainable Development for Asia and the Pacific;
 - (b) The recommendations of the fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, 2000;
 - (c) The Kitakyushu Initiative for a Clean Environment;
6. Ministerial Declaration.
7. Development of the Regional Implementation Plan for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific, 2005-2010, and the Seoul Initiative on Environmentally Sustainable Economic Growth: "Green Growth".
8. Other matters.
9. Adoption of the report.

E. Other matters

(Item 8 of the agenda)

56. There was no other matter raised under this item of the agenda.

F. Adoption of the report

(Item 9 of the agenda)

57. The Meeting adopted its report on 26 March 2005 together with three annexes and decided to submit it to the Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific, 2005 to be held from 28 to 29 March 2005 for its consideration and adoption.