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**STRENGTHENING OF ECE: MATTERS ARISING FROM THE FIFTY-SEVENTH
SESSION OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

(Item 2 of the provisional agenda)

Note by the secretariat

This document presents the results of the fifty-seventh session of UNECE, which are relevant to the Committee's activities. The Committee is invited to take note of the Commission's conclusions and requests and respond to them as appropriate.

INTRODUCTION

1. The fifty-seventh session of the Economic Commission for Europe was held in Geneva from 7 to 10 May 2002. At the session, the Commission took decisions in several areas relevant to the work of the Timber Committee. These decisions included changes to reporting from principal subsidiary bodies (PSBs) to the annual session, strengthening the organization (based on a self evaluation by the Executive Secretary), and a review of technical assistance and operational activities. Recommendations of a more general nature were made with regard to the policy implications of the Spring seminar on “Labour Market Challenges in the UNECE region” and the round table on “Economic aspects of security in Europe”. All Commission documents including the paper on strengthening the organisation may be downloaded from the ECE website (http://www.unece.org/commission/2002/57th_index.htm).
2. In addition, the Commission reaffirmed the role of the Steering Group in contributing to overall policy coherence and strengthening communication in the UNECE.
3. *Questions for discussion or decision by the Committee are in bold italic.*

REPORTING FROM PRINCIPAL SUBSIDIARY BODIES (PSBS) TO THE COMMISSION AT ITS ANNUAL SESSION

4. The Commission decided to endorse the report presented by the Group of Experts on the Programme of Work and its recommendations, which inter alia requested that PSBs prepare for the annual session a brief formal document on their accomplishments, problems and challenges. The reporting procedure, it was agreed, would be reviewed and was open to further consultation. (See para 37)
5. Proposals for this report on the Timber Committee’s accomplishments, problems and challenges will be presented by the secretariat based on guidance to be received from the Commission.

STRENGTHENING THE ORGANIZATION

6. The Executive Secretary of the UNECE had presented a document on “Strengthening the organization”, i.e. a self-assessment of UNECE at the request of the Secretary-General, which is part of the UN’s overall process for strengthening the organization in the light of the Millennium Declaration. In view of the complexity of the issues contained therein, as well as their wide-ranging implications, the Commission felt that further discussions were required, especially on the following issues: introduction of more policy dialogue and of a social and security dimension into UNECE work; the reform of the UNECE intergovernmental structure; the strengthening of the role of the annual session and Bureau; and the future orientation of technical assistance and operational activities.

7. In summary, the Commission suggested that UNECE should focus its activities on those areas where it holds clear and proven expertise and comparative advantage and adds value. Further, the UNECE should build on these strengths, especially in the area of norms and standards setting, and strengthen their monitoring and implementation. The Commission also pointed to the necessity of having focused work programmes corresponding to the needs of all member States, taking into account the mandates of other UN bodies.

8. Developments at the European and global level require refreshing priorities and introducing tangible result-oriented working methods.

9. Measures taken in the process of “strengthening the organization”, the Commission noted, required a demand-driven approach and consultations with all interested parties including the member States and the PSBs. The latter would also have to consider the concrete modalities and the timing of the process. New activities could only be considered when others were discontinued. Any changes should be based on the results of a comprehensive analysis of relevant UNECE activities and related activities undertaken by other international organizations.

10. The Committee bureau considered the Executive Secretary’s report at its meeting in May 2002, and commented as follows:

- The bureaux endorsed the stress put by the Executive Secretary on the policy dialogue and on a cross-sectoral, holistic, approach, as well as on partnerships and avoiding duplication. The Timber Committee was already making a major contribution to the forest policy dialogue in the region, notably through the policy analysis in the outlook studies, the monitoring and discussion of recent policy development at the EFC session, the knowledge infrastructure it provided to policy makers, and the major input it is providing to the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE).
- There is scope for expanding the policy work, building on EFSOS results and profiting from cross sectoral synergies in ECE. The trade/environment/timber work should be developed, providing new resources could be mobilised, from inside or outside ECE. As the subject was of high topical interest, donors might be found for a well designed and focused activity.
- Given the necessity of a holistic approach for truly sustainable development of the forest and timber sector, the ECE/FAO programme has a major comparative advantage in that it has strength in depth, including data, expertise and analytical capacity, for both the upstream (forest management, silviculture, biodiversity) and downstream (markets, trade, production of forest products) sides of the sector, as well as access to bodies with relevant specialisations for instance in the area of social policy, trade policy, environment policy, or macroeconomic analysis.
- There is a strong need to raise the visibility of the Timber Committee’s work in the policy field. The Forest Communicators Network (specialists of public relations for the forest and timber sector) should be asked to contribute. The national missions in Geneva responsible for ECE questions should be kept well informed. A briefing held by the Trade Development and Timber Division was a first step, which should be followed up, for instance by a briefing during the Timber Committee session (Note: the first

such briefing will be held during the 60th session). Bureaux members agreed to brief their representatives in Geneva and in capitals about the timber activities.

- It was stressed that the Strategic Review completed in 2001 had been both thorough and transparent. It had discussed the comparative advantage and strengths of the ECE/FAO programme, which avoids all duplication, through the partnerships with MCPFE, ILO and a wide range of other organisations, including the International Tropical Timber Organisation, OECD and Eurostat, and is firmly focused on the activities which countries considered most important.
- The Committee's holistic approach and its long term commitment to sustainable development of the sector as a whole put it directly in accordance with the priorities laid down for the UN as a whole in the Millennium Declaration in which the UN is committed to "collective efforts for the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests" (Millennium Declaration, para. 23). It was suggested that the secretariat prepare a short briefing paper on how the Timber Committee is contributing to achieving the goals of the Millennium Declaration (Note: the topic will be covered under item 5 International dialogue on forests).
- Another key strength of the Timber Committee, also in line with present UN priorities is the partnership with the private sector, which participates actively in many of the Committee's activities.
- The bureaux considered there were no resource savings to be made from merging the Timber Committee with any other PSBs. Furthermore, there would be a serious danger that the timber expert community would not find it worthwhile to attend a merged committee, with serious negative consequences for political support, policy discussion and the ability to deliver on programme objectives
- The bureaux noted that the Timber Committee, like the rest of ECE, had no control over a major part of the resources allocated to it, the so-called "apportioned costs", whereby a lump sum was assigned to cover all the services provided to ECE by the UN Office in Geneva (meeting facilities, interpretation, document translation and reproduction, office space etc.). Thus there is little flexibility in the use of resources, and the benefits of any savings do not accrue to the unit making the savings. This arrangement was a major distortion and a perverse encouragement to mistaken resource allocation decisions. The bureaux requested the Division Director to urge reform to this arrangement.
- The bureaux noted that to an increasing extent the Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee on Forest Technology, Management and Training was addressing social aspects, for instance in the preparation of the 1998 Ministerial Conference, or at its workshop in 2001 on "Women in Forestry", and that this is in accordance with the direction urged by the Executive Secretary.

11. The Committee will be informed orally of developments since the ECE session.

12. *The Committee is invited to review and comment on the Executive Secretary's proposals, taking the bureau's remarks as a starting point.*

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

13. The Commission agreed that further improvements needed to be introduced to make this important area of work more efficient, transparent, result-oriented, as well as more demand-driven. Other issues noted by the Commission were: focusing on the less developed transition economies when projects are planned and implemented, raising further extra-budgetary resources, increasing cooperation with other international and regional organizations, and improving horizontal coordination.

14. A particular point was made with regard to the need for support of the participation of experts from low- and middle-income transition economies in PSBs and their related activities, which it was felt should be addressed within the framework of the UNECE technical assistance programme. The Commission proposed to review these issues at an ad-hoc session later in 2002.

15. *The Committee is invited to consider whether there should be any changes to its programme in the light of the Commission's statement.*

THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION OF SECURITY IN THE UNECE REGION

16. In the area of economic aspects of security in Europe and particularly in its UNECE-specific sectoral dimension, the Commission invited the chairpersons of all PSBs to re-examine their programmes of work in the context of security and safety concerns. It was expected that this would form the basis for an eventual cross-sectoral analysis of the challenges and potential threats to security that are of relevance to UNECE work.

17. In the view of the secretariat, the Timber Committee's work does not directly contribute to security and safety concerns, although it is influenced by them. The sector suffers economic social and ecological costs from heightened insecurity: if a country or region suffers from insecurity, for instance through war or civil tension, then sustainable forest management is also likely to be threatened, through over-cutting, illegal logging, destruction of infrastructure, death and injury of forest workers etc. The Timber Committee's contribution is indirect, in that it promotes truly sustainable development, and thereby reduces the risk of insecurity.

18. *The Committee is invited to examine its programme of work in the context of security and safety concerns, and indicate whether any changes are desirable to the version agreed after the strategic review.*
