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EMERGING SOCIAL ISSUES**

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**REPORT OF THE HIGH-LEVEL INTERGOVERNMENTAL MEETING TO CONCLUDE
THE ASIAN AND PACIFIC DECADE OF DISABLED PERSONS, 1993-2002**

Note by the secretariat

SUMMARY

The High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Conclude the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, met at Otsu City, Shiga, Japan, from 25 to 28 October 2002. The Meeting reviewed the achievements in the implementation of the Decade goals, highlighted the best practices in policy and programme development in the implementation of the Agenda for Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, and adopted the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, which incorporated the millennium development goals and their relevant targets and identified seven priority areas for action.

The Framework would act as a clear guide for the next Decade, 2003-2012, to ensure that the paradigm shift from a charity-based to a rights-based approach to protect the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of persons with disabilities would be put into practice.

The Meeting noted that subregional priorities varied and that more emphasis on subregional activities and implementation would facilitate the achievement of the targets of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action during the next Decade. To pursue the targets and strategies in the Framework, consultations with and involvement of civil society, especially self-help organizations and concerned non-governmental organizations, were essential.

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I. KEY OUTCOMES OF THE MEETING

1. From a welfare approach to a human rights approach to disability concerns: that summed up the spirit and direction of the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Conclude the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002. The Meeting reviewed the achievements in the implementation of the Decade goals, highlighted the best practices in policy and programme development in the implementation of the Agenda for Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, and adopted the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific. In many countries and areas in the region, the most significant outcome of the Decade was the empowerment of persons with disabilities, their increased capacity to act as agents of change and to participate more fully in society with a consultative role on issues concerning them. Persons with disabilities, and their societies, had benefited from those changes, as a rights-based approach had increasingly replaced a charity- and welfare-based approach to disability.
2. The Meeting assessed the challenges that remained, the barriers that prevented persons with disabilities from enjoying equal participation and rights in the region. More could be done and needed to be done in terms of enacting and implementing relevant legislation, extending inclusive education for all, improving training and employment, addressing poverty, ensuring early intervention and creating a truly barrier-free and rights-based society. Those priority areas were identified in the Biwako Millennium Framework.
3. The Meeting agreed that in spite of the progress that had been made, there was no room for complacency. Further sustained commitment and action were necessary to ensure that the improvements in the rights and participation of persons with disabilities that had been achieved during the Decade were extended to the many persons with disabilities whose lives had not yet been touched. Concerted effort was needed in the next Decade to consolidate and extend the inclusion of disability concerns in mainstream national development policies, plans and implementation.
4. By resolution 58/4 of 22 May 2002 on promoting an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for people with disabilities in the Asian and Pacific region in the twenty-first century, ESCAP had proclaimed the extension of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, for another decade, 2003-2012.
5. The Biwako Millennium Framework outlined issues, action plans and strategies to work towards an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities. To achieve that goal, the Framework identified seven priority areas for action, in each of which critical issues were identified, targets with specific time frames were adopted and required actions were spelled out.

6. The priority policy areas identified in the Biwako Millennium Framework were: (a) self-help organizations of persons with disabilities and related family and parent associations; (b) women with disabilities; (c) early detection, early intervention and education; (d) training and employment, including self-employment; (e) access to built environments and public transport; (f) access to information and communications, including information, communications and assistive technologies; and (g) poverty alleviation through capacity-building, social security and sustainable livelihood programmes.

7. The regional Framework for Action incorporated the millennium development goals and their relevant targets. In all, 21 targets and 17 strategies supporting the achievement of all the targets were identified. The 17 strategies called for (1) comprehensive national plans of action to implement the targets and strategies; (2) non-discrimination policies; (3) national human rights institutions to protect disabled peoples' rights; (4) the involvement of persons with disabilities in policy development; (5) ratification of the core international human rights treaties; (6) and (7) support to the Ad Hoc Committee for a comprehensive and integral international convention to promote and protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities; (8) disability-related data collection and analysis; (9) the adoption of definitions on disability based on the *Guidelines and Principles for the Development of Disability Statistics*;¹ (10) national policies to promote community-based approaches to rehabilitation; (11) and (12) subregional priorities and plans of action to achieve the targets; (13) collaboration of Governments, the United Nations system, civil society organizations and the private sector to support and take advantage of the training and communication capability of the Asian and Pacific Development Centre on Disability; (14) and (15) a network of centres of excellence in focused areas to maximize cooperation and collaboration; (16) intergovernmental cooperation; and (17) cooperation between ESCAP and other regional agencies to exchange information, experience and expertise.

8. The next Decade would ensure that the paradigm shift from a charity-based approach to a rights-based approach to protect the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of persons with disabilities would be put into practice. To pursue the targets and strategies in the Framework, consultations with and the involvement of civil society, especially self-help organizations (SHOs) and concerned non-governmental organizations (NGOs), were essential.

9. The Meeting noted that subregional priorities varied and that more emphasis on subregional activities and implementation would facilitate the achievement of the targets of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action during the next Decade.

¹ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.01.XVII.15.

II. PROCEEDINGS OF THE HIGH-LEVEL INTERGOVERNMENTAL MEETING TO CONCLUDE THE ASIAN AND PACIFIC DECADE OF DISABLED PERSONS, 1993-2002

A. Review of achievements in the implementation of the Agenda for Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002

10. The Meeting had before it a review of regional-level actions in support of the implementation of the Agenda for Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002 (E/ESCAP/APDDP/2).

11. The Meeting noted with appreciation the statement of Mr. Eita Yashiro, Chairperson, Organizing Committee, International Forum on Disabilities to Mark the End Year of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons. He represented the Osaka Forum, held at Osaka, Japan, from 21 to 23 October 2002, the highlights of which he conveyed to the Meeting. The organizations at that Forum had committed themselves to work towards early adoption of a convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, establishing stronger monitoring mechanisms, ensuring proper representation in the Asian and Pacific Disability Forum and providing active cooperation to the Asian and Pacific Development Centre on Disability.

12. The Meeting welcomed the keynote address of Mr. Satoshi Fukushima, Associate Professor, Research Center for Advanced Science and Technology, University of Tokyo. Mr. Fukushima (a deaf-blind person) outlined three key factors necessary for the full participation of people with disabilities. The first was the provision of basic means necessary for people with disabilities to live and participate in society. That implied sufficient access to education and rehabilitation. The second was the cooperation of people who had actual contact with disabled people in their living environment, in particular, mutual cooperation among peers with the same disability and self-help efforts on the part of persons with disabilities and their families. The third was an enabling legal and institutional framework of society that offered a stable basis for the cooperative efforts of people who supported the pursuit of happiness of persons with disabilities. That included legislation prohibiting discrimination against people with disabilities, respect for their dignity and the establishment of institutional systems promoting training and employment of people with disabilities. Mr. Fukushima observed that communication was the most important activity in life.

13. The Meeting recognized that, during the Decade, ESCAP had convened regional meetings to review progress in the implementation of the Agenda for Action. A meeting held at Bangkok in June 1995 had examined the progress made since the inception of the Decade and had adopted 73 targets and 78 recommendations concerning the implementation of the Agenda for Action, including the gender dimensions of implementation. The Meeting of Senior Officials to Mark the Mid-point of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, hosted by the Government of the Republic of Korea at Seoul in September 1997, had reviewed the progress made during the first half of the Decade. The third in the series of regional reviews had been the Regional Forum on Meeting the Targets for the

Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, and Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in the ESCAP Region, held at Bangkok in November 1999. ESCAP had also undertaken a regional survey in 2001 by means of a questionnaire sent to Governments in the region on the implementation of the 12 policy areas in the Agenda for Action.

14. In 2000, the Thematic Working Group on Disability-related Concerns had replaced the Subcommittee on Disability-related Concerns of the Regional Inter-agency Committee for Asia and the Pacific (RICAP) and continued to sustain the momentum towards the fulfilment of the goals of the Decade. The membership of the Thematic Working Group was expanded to include 50 NGOs, 15 government representatives and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

15. The Meeting recognized that of the 12 policy areas in the Agenda for Action, ESCAP efforts had been focused on areas that were not covered by the mandates or expertise of other United Nations bodies and agencies. ESCAP had focused on policy areas concerning national coordination, legislation, information (in particular, disability statistics), accessibility, assistive devices and SHOs of disabled persons.

16. In response to many requests from Governments in the region for model frameworks of legislation, ESCAP had issued two publications in 1995: *Legislation on Equal Opportunities and Full Participation in Development for Disabled Persons: A Regional Review* (ST/ESCAP/1622) and *Legislation on Equal Opportunities and Full Participation in Development for Disabled Persons: Examples from the ESCAP Region* (ST/ESCAP/1651).

17. Among its activities in the area of public awareness, ESCAP had actively supported the regional campaigns that were organized by the Regional NGO Network for the Promotion of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons in collaboration with host governments and local NGOs. Campaign 2001 had been the largest regional campaign; it had adopted the Hanoi Declaration of Campaign 2001 on the Facilitation of Community Integration of People with Disabilities, by which Governments in the region were urged to extend the Decade for another 10 years.

18. The final regional campaign had been held at Osaka, Japan, in October 2002, in conjunction with the International Forum on Disabilities to Mark the End Year of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons.

19. An important area of information was disability statistics. ESCAP had organized two subregional workshops on disability statistics, one at New Delhi and the other at Shanghai, China. In 1997, ESCAP had created a Decade home page, <http://www.unescap.org/decade>. Information on those workshops and about other resources, links to disability-related organizations, reports of the Thematic Working Group on Disability-related Concerns and many ESCAP publications on disability had been posted on that web site.

20. The Meeting observed that one of ESCAP's flagship programmes was the promotion of non-handicapping environments for persons with disabilities. The first phase of that project focused on the development of regional guidelines for the promotion of non-handicapping environments for persons with disabilities and older persons. The guidelines, published in 1995, covered planning and building design, access policy provisions and legislation, and the promotion of public awareness to improve access. Phase two of the project focused on the implementation of the guidelines at the municipal level through pilot projects in Bangkok, Beijing and New Delhi. Among other things, actual accessibility improvements had been achieved at all three pilot sites. The projects had also led Governments to examine policies concerning accessibility for people with disabilities and the issuance of improved regulations on the matter.

21. Those and other ESCAP initiatives in access promotion had contributed to the formation of a regional network of persons with disabilities, architects and urban planners who were active in training government officials and advocating for non-handicapping environments at the municipal, provincial and national levels.

22. In the area of education, the Meeting noted that ESCAP activities were directed at supporting the inclusion of children and youth with disabilities within the Education for All campaigns, led by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Specific activities had covered inclusive education seminars, a forum on the education of children and youth with disabilities and regional surveys on early intervention and education of children and youth with disabilities.

23. ESCAP had collaborated with and supported the International Labour Organization (ILO) in its efforts to strengthen employment placement services. ESCAP and ILO had also contributed to RICAP's training and employment activities in the region. Other related activities had included ESCAP's input to the Global Applied Disability Research and Information Network on Employment and Training opportunities for persons with disabilities through technology.

24. The second of the two of ESCAP's flagship programmes was the empowerment of people with disabilities through their SHOs. Since 1990, in close collaboration with SHOs in the region, ESCAP had developed a set of guidelines on establishing and strengthening SHOs. *Self-help Organizations of Disabled Persons* (ST/ESCAP/1087) had been published in 1991 and translated into five national languages and into English Braille. Other activities in that area had included subregional workshops on the management of SHOs, which had led to the publication of *Management of Self-help Organizations of People with Disabilities* (ST/ESCAP/1849). Regular technical and advisory services in support of SHOs had been provided.

25. Women with disabilities represented one of the most neglected segments of the population. ESCAP, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Fund for Women and other members of RICAP, had developed a project to promote the advancement of women and girls with disabilities.

That project had led to a publication entitled *Hidden Sisters: Women and Girls with Disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region* (ST/ESCAP/1548). ESCAP had also organized a Regional Training Workshop on the Inclusion of Women and Girls with Disabilities in Mainstream Gender Equality Initiatives at Phitsanulok, Thailand, in June 2001, in conjunction with the Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors. That event had led to the establishment of the Regional Network of Women with Disabilities.

26. The Meeting recognized that the links between disability and poverty were increasingly becoming key concerns in ESCAP's work. One of ESCAP's activities in that area had been the Field Study-cum-Regional Seminar on Poverty Alleviation among Rural Persons with Disabilities, organized at Hyderabad, India, in December 1999. That Seminar had been one of the first of its kind to draw attention to the issues of poor persons with disabilities in the rural areas of the developing countries in the ESCAP region.

27. The Technical Cooperation Trust Fund to Support Decade Activities, sustained by contributions from Governments, labour organizations and a private company, had enabled ESCAP to promote intercountry cooperation and facilitate national and local implementation of the 12 areas in the Agenda for Action. The Fund had also provided personnel support for the secretariat's Decade promotion activities.

28. The programmes and activities of several United Nations bodies and agencies in support of the Decade were also noted. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) had initiated programmes for farmers with disabilities and formulated advice to policy makers and programme designers to improve women's knowledge of nutrition and food safety and the prevention of accidents. FAO had also established a database on persons with disabilities in rural areas. ILO had carried out many programmes on increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The International Telecommunication Union had produced a recommendation to raise funds to develop programmes for women, including women with disabilities, and to enhance their skills in information and communications technology (ICT). The United Nations Development Programme's Disability Action Group had promoted the inclusion of people with disabilities in mainstream programmes on sustainable human development. UNESCO had promoted inclusive approaches to education to increase the full participation of children and youth with special educational needs in both in-school and out-of-school activities. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had prioritized assistance to refugees with disabilities. The United Nations Children's Fund had worked on issues related to childhood disability and the design of effective interventions, including access to mainstream education and other social services. The World Health Organization had promoted the concept and implementation of community-based rehabilitation. ADB had a project to identify disability issues in poverty reduction.

29. The Meeting recognized that without strong support at the regional level, the implementation of the unique regional Decade at the national level would have been difficult. With that same support, the region planned to implement another Decade to achieve an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities. To achieve that goal, the Meeting called for each member of the United Nations system to further strengthen its work and join hands to create synergy between regional cooperation and support.

30. In the round-table discussion on lessons learned for future action from the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, Mr. Guo Jianmo, Secretary General, State Council Coordination Committee on Disabilities, China, pointed out that disability was an issue of both human rights and social development. On the one hand, the basic human rights of people with disabilities as members of society needed to be upheld and on the other hand, there was a need to emphasize that social development was the indispensable precondition to realize human rights. The Government of China believed that the formulation and implementation of an international convention on the rights of disabled persons would be a powerful and effective means to advance the world disability movement. The adoption of such a convention would make the existing United Nations human rights convention system more rational and complete and would be a milestone in the history of the world disability movement.

31. Ms. Anuradha Mohit of the National Human Rights Commission of India noted that in addition to gaining a human rights perspective, there was growing realization that disability was not a deviation, but an integral characteristic of every society; therefore, the solution did not lie in short-term alleviation of individual problems using State institutions, voluntary organizations and bilateral and multilateral funding bodies. Instead, it was necessary to integrate disability dimensions into basic structures that were fundamental to the organization of every society. No meaningful change could come about for persons with disabilities unless the various social and economic processes of civil society were redefined based on disability-inclusive standards.

32. The Agenda for Action provided clear guidance and direction for action towards the achievement of the goal of participation of and equal opportunity for persons with disabilities. Even in countries and areas where the Proclamation on the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region had been signed recently, there had been significant progress in several policy areas, including the establishment of national coordinating mechanisms; a strong partnership had developed between Government and NGOs of persons with disabilities and funding assistance had been provided to strengthen those SHOs. Significant initiatives had been undertaken in the areas of data collection and information, public awareness and access to education as a right for all children, including children with disabilities. Involvement in regional training workshops and meetings had increased national capacity for action and regional cooperation had resulted in beneficial exchanges of experience and sharing of good practices.

B. Highlights of the implementation of the Agenda for Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002

1. Legislation and coordinating mechanisms on disability matters

33. The Meeting observed that every country that had reported its progress during the Decade had made a quantum leap in adding the disability dimension to its national policy structure by enacting or amending laws, establishing a long-term disability plan or a national coordination mechanism on disability policy. Those laws were largely to protect the human rights of persons with disabilities and covered various aspects of their social life, ranging from political participation to education on the use of guide dogs. Further deepening of a rights-based approach at the national and international levels was a goal of the next Decade.

34. The Meeting noted that 27 Governments in the region had formed national coordinating committees on disability. The establishment of such committees was being planned in seven other countries and areas. National policy and action plans had been developed in 16 countries and areas and were being developed in 13 others. Some Governments had taken significant steps to include disability issues within national development plans, including human rights and poverty concerns. Some Governments also held regular consultations with specially formed consultative committees of people with disabilities.

35. The Meeting recognized that a major constraint to progress towards the goal of full participation and equality of persons with disabilities was the continuing lack of recognition of disability as a development concern. It appeared that disability was still perceived as primarily a welfare issue.

36. In the area of legislation, the Meeting recognized that 13 Governments had adopted comprehensive disability legislation, 9 Governments had reported that legislation was being prepared, and 27 Governments had enacted, or were revising, extensive additional specific legislation or regulations. Measures for the enforcement and enactment of anti-discrimination legislation had also been undertaken by a number of Governments.

37. The Meeting identified the major challenge in that area as the establishment of stricter mechanisms for the enforcement of legislation and the application of penalties for non-compliance.

2. Education for children and youth with disabilities

38. The Meeting noted that the issue of education for children with disabilities was of particular concern in the Asian and Pacific region. The rate of enrolment for children without disabilities had reached acceptable levels and was improving in many parts of the region, but the rate of access to school for children with disabilities remained unacceptably low. Recent trends had shown increased commitment by Governments of the region to include education for children with disabilities in national education policy. That was evident in many Asian and Pacific countries and areas, as was the

growing trend towards including many children with disabilities in regular schools. Effective educational outcomes could be achieved for all children through methods that resulted in changes in attitudes and teaching practices, with close working partnerships formed between families, schools and local communities.

39. The Meeting observed that inclusive educational systems could be successfully introduced in resource-poor developing countries and that with careful and systematic introduction, exponential growth in enrolment rates for children with disabilities could be achieved over a period of several years.

40. In the region, developed countries had made more progress in providing education for all children with disabilities, including those with severe and multiple disabilities. Progress had been achieved in making schools barrier-free. Early intervention and teacher training which prepared all teachers to teach children with diverse capabilities were identified as two important components that contributed to successful educational outcomes for all children, including children with disabilities.

41. The Meeting stressed that only an estimated 2 to 5 per cent of children with disabilities in developing countries in the region had access to school. The lack of data on the number and prevalence of children with disabilities made it impossible to measure progress adequately or gain a better understanding of those issues.

42. The Meeting noted, however, that there was some evidence that the situation was improving. Legislation mandating education for all children had been adopted or was planned by 20 Governments. However, only a few Governments had provided for the inclusion of children with disabilities in national Education for All plans. The predominant form of access to education had been through the provision of separate schools, but inclusive educational provision was increasing. Twenty-seven Governments reported some access to regular schools for children and youth with disabilities.

43. The Meeting noted with concern that education for all by 2015, a goal shared by the Dakar Framework for Action and one of the millennium development goals, would not be achieved in the region without increased commitment by Governments and civil society.

3. Freedom of movement and independent living

44. The Meeting observed that many countries had actively and successfully implemented specific measures to improve accessibility to the built environment and public transport in both the public and private sectors. One of the important issues raised was that ensuring accessibility meant establishing the right for persons with disabilities to integrate into society. Increasing the active participation of disabled persons in the development and implementation of access policy was an essential component for successful implementation of the next Decade's goals.

45. Progress had been made in that area, as 24 Governments had passed, or were developing, legislation and standards on accessible environments and transport. Lack of barrier-free environments and equal access to information and communications technology precluded full participation of all but a few disabled people in a limited number of urban environments. In terms of accessible environments and services much more needed to be done. Where related legislation had been passed, it was often not enforced.

4. Training and employment

46. The Meeting reviewed many examples of improvement in access to training and education, which were essential for productive employment. Greater access to education by persons with disabilities had been achieved with special schools, schools in which classes for persons with disabilities were integrated and inclusive schools in which persons with disabilities attended the same classes as other students.

47. Governments had strengthened vocational education programmes for persons with disabilities and were increasingly incorporating advanced technology in such training by providing training on ICT, for example.

48. Governments had promoted the employment of persons with disabilities by, inter alia, establishing employment quotas for the government sector and private sector enterprises and providing interest-free loans for self-employment.

49. The Meeting observed that NGOs had also made a significant contribution to the training and employment of persons with disabilities; some employers and employers' organizations had contributed to the training and employment of persons with disabilities. The lack of trained personnel hampered government efforts to provide general education and vocational training for persons with disabilities.

50. The Meeting noted that of 27 Governments that provided vocational training services, 5 were in the early stages of establishing such services. Nine countries were moving towards integrated provision of vocational training. Many strategies had been adopted to promote increased rates of employment of people with disabilities. Twelve countries had implemented a quota system, with incentives and fines being used to ensure enforcement. Additional strategies included job search agencies, employment placement and support centres, wage subsidy, job coaching, trial employment and industrial profiling. Strategies to promote self-employment and income generation through small grant funding, microcredit and loans were reported in a number of countries. Those Governments and others reported a specific focus on the employment of people with disabilities in rural areas. The Government of Japan had been focusing on employment promotion for people with severe disabilities within the private sector.

5. Access to information and communications

51. The Meeting noted that while there were benefits to be gained from ICT development, there were also gaps, in particular, for persons with disabilities. Without addressing the digital divide issue, the Asian and Pacific region would not be able to create an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society.

52. Delegations noted that the Meeting provided a good example of communication and exchange of experience on ICT accessibility. It was the first time that United Nations documentation had been made fully accessible to all delegations, including those who were deaf-blind, in CD-ROM version, using the Digital Audio Information System (DAISY) format. That format provided technical support, including reading in Braille, real-time captions for hearing impaired participants, Braille support and sign language interpretation for deaf participants.

53. The Meeting noted that some countries already provided talking software and large keyboards for visually impaired people. Partial subsidies for the purchase of personal computers and peripheral equipment for persons with disabilities were provided in some countries.

54. One country had built legal and institutional structures, such as a disability welfare law, a broadcasting act, a convenience promotion act, a human rights charter for persons with disabilities, a basic law to promote information and a law on eliminating the digital divide. That legislation was designed to guarantee the rights of disadvantaged groups, including persons with disabilities, and to ensure access to and use of information.

55. The promotion of access to the most common means of communication was among the 107 targets for action contained in the Agenda for Action. The Meeting noted that the target to develop and disseminate indigenous sign language, train sign language interpreters and ensure equal access to communication had yet to be fully realized.

56. In that regard, the Meeting stressed the need to develop and coordinate standardized national sign language, tactile sign language, Braille, Finger Braille and easy-to-read publications in each country in the region and to train sign language interpreters, Braille translators and Finger Braille interpreters and have them engaged in full-time employment. Some countries had already developed assistive devices such as books in Braille, talking books and a national sign language system.

57. The Meeting recognized that access to communications technology and computer literacy was clearly limited and not available to the majority of people with disabilities, especially those living in rural areas or urban poverty.

6. Poverty alleviation and community participation of rural persons with disabilities

58. Increasingly, the link between poverty and disability and the unmet needs of the majority of disabled persons living in rural areas were being recognized. The capacities of persons with

disabilities needed to be developed so that they could contribute to community-based solutions to the particular problems they faced. Governments needed to ensure that vulnerable persons with disabilities were able to access health, education, training and employment services and were integrated into community development programmes. The low rates of access to appropriate education for children with disabilities and high rates of unemployment for youth and adults with disabilities needed urgent attention.

59. The Meeting agreed that poor people with disabilities could, themselves, contribute to poverty alleviation efforts when the enabling environment was established. That would mean accurate identification of needs, a consultative process in design and implementation, especially between Governments, the private sector and civil society, generating the necessary resources and enacting the relevant legislation and policies. The Meeting recognized that development was about inclusion and that there was a need to shift from a charity approach to a rights-based and socio-economic approach to disability issues.

60. The Meeting noted that poverty alleviation efforts required an integrated approach linking prevention and rehabilitation with empowerment strategies and changes in attitudes.

61. The establishment of national databases was essential to provide accurate information on people with disabilities and their situations, without which it was difficult to plan appropriate services and monitor progress towards the achievement of full participation and equality.

7. Self-help organizations of persons with disabilities and issues concerning
women with disabilities

62. The Meeting noted that there had been a significant shift during the Decade in the importance placed on organizations of persons with disabilities; in the Biwako Millennium Framework they had received a higher priority than in the previous Decade. Persons with disabilities had moved from a situation of extreme vulnerability, restriction on their activities and being perceived as a threat to service providers. The previous Decade had been perceived as a time of struggle to have their voices heard but as the next Decade approached persons with disabilities were demanding a more prominent role, to be accepted as contributing members of society, to “sit at the table” and to be consulted on all issues concerning themselves and their organizations. As organizations of persons with disabilities demanded and accepted more responsibility, it was important that they focused on group solidarity while remaining sensitive to specific single disability issues and rural and gender equity. Organizations of persons with disabilities would play a key role in the realization of the goals of the Biwako Millennium Framework and Governments needed to support capacity-building and leadership training to promote that role. The double discrimination of women with disabilities was noted, but that phenomenon was changing and initiatives for leadership training were increasing on a national and regional basis. Further emphasis on those activities was required in the next Decade.

63. The Meeting noted the importance of training a new generation of young leaders, including young women with disabilities, and of achieving the establishment of a national organization of persons with disabilities in each country and area of the ESCAP region during the next Decade.

64. Governments in the region were becoming increasingly supportive of SHOs and valued their role in advising Governments on disability concerns. Twenty-two countries had formed national cross-disability organizations of people with disabilities or SHOs. Four were in the process of forming such groups. Seventeen Governments had provided for input by SHOs into national policy development and 12 Governments had provided funding assistance to strengthen and support the development of SHOs.

65. Some SHOs had developed without government support. The lack of coordination of many disparate and often single disability groups had weakened the capacity of SHOs to advocate their cause effectively. Better coordination of those entities would clearly be beneficial to Governments and people with disabilities.

66. The situation of partnership and consultation between Governments and SHOs had not yet been satisfactorily achieved within the region and progress towards it had been slow.

C. Consideration of a regional framework for action towards an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific

1. Biwako Millennium Framework

67. The Meeting had before it document E/ESCAP/APDDP/4, entitled "Draft Biwako millennium framework for action towards an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific".

68. The Meeting agreed that the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action would be valuable in setting guidelines and targets for national, subregional and regional programmes on disability over the next 10 years. The Meeting welcomed the paradigm shift which incorporated disability into an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based framework. It concurred that the seven priority areas specified in the Framework provided a useful focus for future programmes and activities.

69. The Meeting strengthened the draft Biwako Millennium Framework by adding targets and recommended actions on ICT, Braille and sign language, early identification of disability and sports, leisure and recreation for persons with disabilities.

70. The Meeting gave particular attention to the situation of persons with intellectual disabilities and those with severe disabilities. It recommended that their situation be specifically incorporated in the next regional review conducted by ESCAP of policies and programmes related to disability.

71. The Meeting considered the Biwako Millennium Framework and adopted it on 28 October 2002 for submission to the Commission for its endorsement.

2. Subregional priorities and recommendations

72. The Meeting recognized the particular areas of concern in the different subregions, which were identified by subregional discussion groups. The groups suggested recommendations for the Meeting to consider.

(a) *Subregional group on the Pacific*

73. The group considered all the priority areas equally important and noted that the order of priority would differ for different countries and areas within the region.

74. The group recognized that, for the Pacific subregion, there would be continued emphasis on the initiatives of the 1993-2002 Decade, such as legislation and legislative revision, national policy and planning, inclusive and compulsory education, the strengthening of SHOs, organizations of women with disabilities, organizations of parents and families and support and encouragement of parents to act as advocates for their children with disabilities.

75. The group identified subregional cooperation as a strategy that would need to be strengthened. That would facilitate the development and use of networks of and for persons with disabilities and caregivers and families of children with disabilities; training workshops within the subregion, using local expertise where available, supplemented by regional experts; strong cooperative relationships with some more developed countries of the region; exchange programmes; and the organization of awareness training and programmes. Awareness training and programmes should increase the awareness and commitment of Governments of the subregion to the rights and concerns of persons with disabilities, to promote the political will to develop policy, legislation and implement measures required to mainstream disability issues into national development.

76. The group suggested a strong focus on increased access to and support for education for all children with disabilities, vocational training and employment opportunities for youth and adults with disabilities.

(b) *Subregional group on South and South-West Asia*

77. The subregional discussion group agreed to the Biwako Millennium Framework and observed that countries should contextualize the priorities and add new priorities, if necessary, to address country-specific circumstances. The group identified a number of concerns that could be emphasized, including the participation of families and parents' associations; support should be given to networks of women with disabilities; early detection mechanisms should be put in place and training of personnel in education reinforced; and the percentage of children with disabilities in mainstream schools should be at least that of non-disabled children in school in that particular country.

78. The group emphasized that the health of persons with disabilities should be given special attention; the private sector should be encouraged to employ persons with disabilities; there should be universal standardization of access features in built environments; and barriers should be removed in the areas of telecommunication and broadcasting.

79. The group recognized that inter-ministerial and intra-ministerial coordination needed to be strengthened; disability perspectives should be integrated into all development policies and programmes; regional trade agreements should be drawn up for a partnership market; existing legislation should be reviewed for discriminatory clauses; and community-based rehabilitation should be modelled on the concept of independent living, which included peer counselling. The group noted that support should be given to the initiative for an international convention to protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities.

(c) *Subregional group on South-East Asia*

80. The group recognized that high priority should be given to poverty alleviation and its linkages with the prevention of avoidable causes of disabilities, particularly in rural areas.

81. The group suggested that the Meeting consider strengthening the strategy on training and employment, including self-employment; public awareness should be included as a cross-cutting strategy in all seven priority areas; the priority area of access to information and communications, including ICT, should be broadened to include assistive technology; and the report of the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting should encourage Governments to study the feasibility of establishing an ASEAN commission on disability to support subregional cooperation in the implementation of the Biwako Millennium Framework.

82. The group noted that the Asian and Pacific Development Centre on Disability could also be valuable for regional cooperation on the implementation of the Biwako Millennium Framework.

83. The group discussed at length the issue of target-setting. Some delegations observed that the targets would be difficult to achieve, but agreed that the setting of targets was desirable as a means of monitoring and assessing the achievement of the Biwako Millennium Framework and stimulating needed action in that regard.

(d) *Subregional group on East and North-East Asia*

84. The group agreed that all of the seven priority areas were common and important concerns of the subregion as well as of the Asian and Pacific region. The group recognized that each country must contextualize and prioritize the areas for implementation at the national level.

85. The group suggested to the Meeting that subregional cooperation was of the utmost importance because sharing information and learning from good practices within the subregion would enhance country-level implementation and, in turn, advance the overall quality of life of persons with disabilities in the subregion as a whole.

86. The group identified access to ICT as a useful area for cooperation, especially in the exchange and transfer of technology. Access to built environments and public transport was identified as another good area for cooperation. Countries such as Japan and the Republic of Korea could share their good accessibility practices with other countries.

87. Though not included in the seven priority areas, subregional elaboration, discussion, research and information sharing on development of a comprehensive and integral international convention to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities was considered another area for cooperation.

88. Poverty alleviation should be emphasized since the subregion had the largest number of disabled persons in the Asian and Pacific region. Independent living, support networks in the community and the employment of disabled persons should be promoted to alleviate poverty.

III. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

A. Background and objectives

89. The High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Conclude the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002 was convened by ESCAP in collaboration with concerned parties in the United Nations system, in accordance with resolution 54/1 of 22 April 1998 on strengthening regional support for persons with disabilities into the twenty-first century. It was hosted by the Government of Japan and the government of Shiga Prefecture.

90. By resolution 58/4 of 22 May 2002 on promoting an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for people with disabilities in the Asian and Pacific region in the twenty-first century, the Commission had urged all its members and associate members to participate actively in the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting, review the outcome of the implementation of the Agenda for Action and formulate and adopt a framework for action for the next Decade.

B. Opening of the Meeting

91. The Meeting was formally opened by the Executive Secretary of ESCAP. In his opening address, he welcomed the delegations and outlined the agenda of the Meeting. He thanked the Government of Japan for its sustained support for the implementation of the Decade goals and for hosting the Meeting. ESCAP reviews had shown that since the inception of the Decade, overall improvement in all 12 policy categories in the Agenda for Action had been evident, although achievements had been uneven. There had been significant achievements in the areas of national coordination, legislation and policy development and some improvement in the areas of the prevention of causes of disability, rehabilitation services, access to built environments and the development of self-help organizations of disabled persons. However, an alarmingly low rate of

access to education for children and youth with disabilities and marked subregional disparities in the implementation of the Agenda for Action still existed.

92. A welcoming address was delivered by Mr. Yoshitsugu Kunimatsu, Governor of Shiga Prefecture. He welcomed the delegations to Shiga Prefecture and Otsu City. He pointed to the unique historical tradition in Shiga of ensuring an environment where persons with disabilities could contribute to and benefit from society. That tradition was represented in the person of Kazuo Itoga, in whose name and memory an award was given each year to individuals who had made outstanding contributions in the Asian and Pacific region.

93. The inaugural address of the Prime Minister of Japan, Mr. Junichiro Koizumi, was delivered by Mr. Issei Anan, Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, Government of Japan. He welcomed the delegations to the Meeting and assured them of the Government of Japan's continued commitment to the concerns of persons with disabilities.

94. Mr. Tetsuro Yano, Senior Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, in his welcoming address recognized the work of ESCAP during the Decade and highlighted some initiatives in Japan. He stressed, however, that more effort had to be made, especially in the areas of education, job training, self-help organizations, the protection of women with disabilities and the creation of a barrier-free environment.

95. The Meeting expressed deepest appreciation to the Government of Japan, Shiga Prefecture and Otsu City for their generous support and for hosting the Meeting.

C. Attendance

96. The Meeting was attended by ministers and representatives of the following ESCAP members and associate members: Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Turkey, Vanuatu, Viet Nam, Cook Islands and Hong Kong, China.

97. The following United Nations bodies and specialized agencies were represented: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Children's Fund, International Labour Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and World Bank.

98. The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, an intergovernmental organization, was represented.

99. Many NGOs, including ones in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, and other organizations involved with disability issues were represented at the Meeting.

D. Election of officers

100. The Meeting elected Mr. Issei Anan (Japan) Chairperson; Mr Abdullah Wardak (Afghanistan), Mr. Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed (Bangladesh), Ms. Prak Chantha (Cambodia), Mr. Guo Jianmo (China), Mr. Vaevaetaearoi Vaevae-Pare (Cook Islands), Ms. Adi Asenaca Caucau Filipe (Fiji), Dato' Hajah Siti Zaharah binti Sulaiman (Malaysia) and Mr. Jadambaa Rardan (Mongolia) Vice-Chairpersons; and Mr. Stephen Pang (Hong Kong, China) Rapporteur.

E. Adoption of the agenda

101. The Meeting adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the Meeting.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda.
4. Review of achievements in the implementation of the Agenda for Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002.
5. Highlights of the implementation of the Agenda for Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002:
 - (a) Legislation and coordinating mechanisms on disability matters;
 - (b) Education for children and youth with disabilities;
 - (c) Freedom of movement and independent living;
 - (d) Training and employment;
 - (e) Access to information and communications;
 - (f) Poverty alleviation and community participation of rural persons with disabilities;
 - (g) Self-help organizations of persons with disabilities and issues concerning women with disabilities.
6. Consideration of a regional framework for action towards an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific.
7. Adoption of the report.
8. Closing of the Meeting.

F. Adoption of the report

102. The Meeting adopted its report on 28 October 2002.

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